Self & Self-Transformation in the History of Religion

Edited by: David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa

SELF AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

This double-faced goblet, ascribed to the thirteenth century BCE, was found in a cultic building ("Temple 30") excavated at Tell Abu Hawam (in the Haifa Bay). This locally unique vessel has parallels at, e.g., Minat el-Baida on the Lebanese Coast and Enkomi in Cyprus. The double-faced deity, attested "from India even unto Kush," here predates the Roman Janus by many centuries and serves proof of the universality and endurance of the concepts of duality and transformation. Moreover, it reflects the early Oriental roots of a Roman deity. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Exhibited and photo © Israel Museum

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Once more,
for Sarah and Eileen

shāhedī az loṭf-o pākī
rashk-i āb-i zindagī
delbarī dar ḥosn-o khūbī
ghairat-i māh-i tamām
[*Hafez*]

One gentle and flowing
like the water of life
one the envy of the luminous moon

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SELF AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

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DAVID SHULMAN AND GUY G. STROUMSA

Introduction

Persons, Passages, and Shifting Cultural Space

Cultures and Selves

The "self," whatever we might mean by this term, is surely not an entity, nor should we use the pronoun "it" when we speak of self: language traps us in the very first sentence in this domain. Similarly, to speak of transforming some non-it into something else is bound to be misleading, as if a self could be held in language, or in the mind, long enough to be transformed. The entire problem has a somewhat provincial, Western aspect, as we can see from the striking absence of analogous concepts to our notion of self in other civilizations. Nonetheless, there does seem to be a universal theme at the heart of all the major religious cultures of the world that has to do with effecting structured transitions in the inner world of the living subject, who seems always to require such change. Moreover, these transitions fall into certain prevalent categories, with distinctive correlations to other parts of the person as culturally imagined, and to the reality in which this person is believed to live.

Why do we find in all the major civilizations, and perhaps in all human cultures, this insistence on the need for the person to change in radical ways? We are not content with who we are, individually or collectively. Even an ideal of contentment seems to require constant effort on the part of the individual, who is normally torn apart by the inner struggles of fantasy, frustration, and hope. Beyond this, however, lies the fact that human existence as such is almost inevitably felt to be lacking in critical ways—limited in its potential for understanding, preyed upon by death and illness, subject to the experience of partiality and repeated frustration, given to possession by alien forces from without or from within, and so on. Each culture addresses and articulates this perceived lack in terms of its own assumptions about reality. For the Greeks, for example, perhaps the central problem of religion is the unbridgeable gap between human beings and gods.[1] Ritual means become available, in such a world, to enable the human person to overcome this gap—to become a god. Greek tragedy reflects the highly complex system set in place to enable this process to unfold. The further development of tragedy in Rome, however, shows that

the mere existence of a relatively stable individual may entail a process of continuous inner change.[2] In China, by way of contrast, self-transcendence seems often to have a transient and paradoxical quality, taking the person through exotic existential states that at once overcome the irksome limitations of being human and engender a powerful nostalgia for that same human state.[3] For all religious cultures, mortality itself is a scandal that demands solutions along the lines of self-transformation. To use the classic term of William James, the founding figure of modern psychology of religion, our initial birth as human beings requires, at least for the religious virtuoso, a "second birth," that is, some form of radical transformation, an undoing and refashioning of the person.[4]

In another, deeper sense, we are not merely who we seem, even to ourselves. Alien realities are intimately woven into selfness (to borrow a term from Don Handelman's postlude).[5] It is the business of culture to probe and play with such realities, while forcing choices.

The self, like the individual, has been discovered and rediscovered in many civilizations — as Marcel Mauss stated many years ago in a seminal and programmatic essay emphasizing the particular power of this discovery in Brahminical India and in China.[6] Decades of research by anthropologists, historians of religion, and students of culture have followed the parameters that Mauss laid down. Our goal in this volume is to explore a related aspect of this problem which seems not to have elicited focused attention. While Mauss searched for the cultural variations in the idea of the person throughout the great civilizations, we explore here the inherently transformative quality of the self as culturally conceived and understood, in specific cultural and religious systems — its structured tendencies to shift, to split, to unravel, to disappear, to cumulate new levels or parts, to disencumber itself of levels or parts, to refashion, deepen, or diminish its own self-awareness in changing contexts, and so on, all of these processes occurring either voluntarily or not, but very often through heavily determined and ritualized acts. Moreover, we are interested in the catalytic effect such changes, and such conceptualizations, have had upon the institutional and dynamic core of each given civilization — that is, the power of the transformed or self-transforming self to work transformation on the containing cultural context. The core issues have to do with the impact of both implicit and explicit religious views and attitudes upon anthropology, that is, perceptions of the person and of his or her boundaries and relations with the surrounding world. These issues become perspicuous in a comparative framework that takes account of the specificities of variation in self and self-transformation in a wide range of cultures, societies, and religions.

Moving westward from China, India, and Tibet to the Mediterranean world of classical times and late antiquity and thence to medieval and early-modern Europe, via the religions of the Near East and Iran, we have found in each case notions of what we will continue to call self-transformation — distinguishing "self" from "soul" (which usually does not require or allow transformation) and from the confused list of related metapsychological concepts such as "persona," "ego," and "subject." In all the cases we have examined, transformation is regularly patterned and culturally determined — never chaotic, random, or unstructured. The kind of transformation(s) a culture puts forward as a goal or possibility for human life always expresses the primary axioms, conflicts, and intuitions that make up its particular world.

There are, for example, civilizations predicated on a notion of continual self-transformation that proceeds from the very center of the cultural enterprise: Tibet is perhaps the outstanding example, although other Buddhist cultures as well as Hindu south India also belong in this class. Both Tibet and Tamil south India bring to this goal a remarkably elastic sense of self—for the Buddhist Tibetans, the very term is negated—and a vision of osmotic boundaries within "it" or between this fluid inner-ness and other, especially tentatively external, realities. Nonetheless, inner change is sought in a continuous, for the most part gradual, discipline of praxis, meditation, and prayer, and the transformation "finally" achieved may be seen as irreversible, as when the poet-devotee fuses into god, or when Enlightenment, which cannot be "reached," is nonetheless realized. Contrast this model with those in which transformation seems to well up from the margins of the cultural system, sometimes in a moment of violent rupture with the whole of the individual's past: Oedipus, breaking through to a tragic self-knowledge, is irrevocably transformed and at the same moment turned into an impure scapegoat, to be driven from his city. His shrine, the site of his ultimate apotheosis, is, characteristically, at the boundary of the city. Similarly, Medea, endowed with the witch's deep power to shape reality, swelling violently into her self, invades and consumes the center of the kingdom from its excluded periphery. Yet ancient Greece places the experiences of the self that is torn inwardly toward madness or fury at the very heart of its ritual and aesthetic order: tragedy, which articulates and precipitates such experience, is enacted each year at the springtime festival that brings the god Dionysus into active presence in Athens. The god's unstable wavering between states of full or partial presence is also, incidentally, suggestive of the transformability of even, or especially, such divine "selves."

Self in Religion

One typological divide, then, is that between models of gradual self-transformation, often built upon the active cultivation over years of ascesis or meditative praxis, and those of sudden or even violent change in the composition of the self—for example, in religious conversion. In other words, the self is sometimes the active agent of its own evolution and in other cases a passive recipient of the process, perhaps even its victim. Cases of possession by demons or evil spirits illustrate the latter mode. But it is not always easy to distinguish such possession from deeper processes within the hidden reaches of the subject's inner "self": the possessing presence may well turn out to be a true part of the person emerging through his or her more superficial levels of consciousness. We might also invoke in this context Bergson's distinction between the *moi profond* and the *moi social*—and thus we find ourselves asking, repeatedly, if the phenomenon we are examining is a matter of figure or ground, of an inner self undergoing radical change or of the contextual, social reconfiguration of a process unfolding primarily on the surface. In both cases, however—"real" changes in subjectivity or its social appearances—we insist on the cultural component active in this process.

There is perforce a certain ambiguity in the terms we use—"culture" and "religion," to take two prominent examples that have already emerged in our discussion. These concepts are not coextensive, though we often see clear overlapping in pri-

mary intuitions and explicit axioms. Sometimes deep-seated perceptions of self cut through religious boundaries — for example, in late antique Babylonia where, as Shaul Shaked shows, phenomena of demonic possession and healing are common to Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews, and Mandeans. Similarly, Platonic notions of the stratigraphy of the inner self were shared, with specific variation and changing emphases, by Muslims, Jews, and Christians in the medieval Mediterranean world. On the other hand, a strong "religious" assertion about the self — such as the Buddhist denial of its existence — may color self-experience and processes of transformation in highly diverse cultures.

We are aware, of course, that these experiences of self-transformation belong to a highly broad and diversified spectrum. Conversion and possession — to recall only the two just mentioned — border upon phenomena such as shamanism, mystical ecstasy, divinization and apotheosis, and crises of guilt and repentance. By casting a broad net, while focusing as sharply as possible on anthropological aspects of the questions at hand, we seek to point out new dimensions of, and new connections among, these phenomena and to suggest consistent patterns in which perceptions of self and identity are culturally dismantled and reorganized.

Let us restate the problem in somewhat wider categorical terms. All religious systems offer ritual programs, more or less elaborate, of varying types, whose primary goals are either to transform the participants from one state to another or to mark such transformation. Ritual is perhaps the creative mode of religious life par excellence — the arena in which the person is created along with his or her universe. This is always a social and cultural act expressive of highly specific themes and understandings; or, seen differently, these ritual processes can be said to provide an empirical laboratory in which one works upon self and world. Change may be transient or permanent: the south Indian Śaiva turns himself into God every morning; the recurrent necessity of performing this ritual suggests that its effects are far from lasting. Even Plotinus, if we follow Porphyry's biography, achieved union with God only four times in his life. On the other hand, some ritual transformations — circumcision, for example — are more or less irreversible; others *should* be irreversible, axiomatically, as in the case of conversion to Islam.

Often, however, there is a subtle, perhaps indefinable, quality to transformation. What happens to the self in the course of daily prayer, or in the course of sacrifice, or when taking the Eucharist? In all such cases, we should probably assume a dynamic, restless quality to "selfness." Within this field of interweaving energies, of parts swelling into momentary wholes and then dissolving back into relatively isolated voices or shadow-selves, there is, it seems, room for systemic impingement in a culturally chosen direction. Such is the logic of those rites de passage which pick up the person at a certain point and drop him or her off later, at another, after working change. Natural cycles of maturation, in which transformation might be said to "happen," become artifacts or signposts pointing toward a culturally defined telos. Initiation is the usual frame for such events.

Such extended moments of maturation may be very dramatic. South Asian models of moving from childhood into an adult consciousness often seem to require literally losing one's head: the infant son of Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa, becomes "himself," as it were, only when his father, Śiva, beheads him and then replaces his lost head with that of an elephant. There is something paradigmatic about such a shift, which is,

perhaps, implicit in the *saṃskāra* rituals of growth and self-definition in Brahminical India. Elsewhere, to mature may require a head-on confrontation with forms of madness (also culturally patterned). On the Greek island of Skyros in the three-week period known as Apokries that precedes Lent, young men mask their faces with the skins of unborn kids, ripped from the womb, and dance in the agora, their waists laden with ropes carrying 50 kilos of metal goat-bells. Ecstasy ensues—or, perhaps, if one follows the myth they tell in Skyros to explain the ritual, it is not so much ecstasy as the near madness of the adult goatherd who loses all in order to have anything at all, who will, throughout his life, sacrifice and eat the goats he loves. This is a moment of ripening: spring is ripening out of winter; white goat's cheese is slowly maturing from Apokries through Lent; the ultimate sacrifice of Easter is being readied, man ripening into God; and young Skyrian goatherds are dancing themselves out of boyhood. The point that concerns us is the patterned and recurrent transformation in awareness that this culture demands of its adolescent boys if they are to turn into grown men. The way lies through altered states, through madness or near madness experienced, intimately known, danced, owned.

The last case reflects once more the impossibility of any clear-cut distinction between "culture" and "religion." The transformation of the self undergone by the Skyrian goatherds is embedded in the Christian liturgical calendar, yet it clearly echoes societal and seasonal patterns that have little to do with Christian theology. To repeat one of our main working hypotheses, however, religions exhibit particular views not only of the divine, or of the cosmos, but also of the person. Religious anthropology is as central as theology and is reflected in ritual. The nature of the person, his or her functions, and the conditions and circumstances under which this person can be transformed are different in each religious context. It has been observed that around the middle of the first millennium B.C.E., a period called the *Achsenzeit* by Karl Jaspers, a dramatic change of paradigm occurred in various archaic cultures, from China, through India, Iran, and Israel, to Greece, leading to radically new religious approaches and perceptions of the person and of the soul. In very rough terms, one can speak of a new sense of transcendence, in both cosmic and anthropological terms. The great classical cultures and religions of the ancient world represent the various embodiments of this paradigmatic watershed. This breakthrough had, of course, direct implications for possible mutations of the self and of its counterpart and other, the "soul," which could under some conditions, and certainly after death, move from one world to the other, as it were. A new reflexivity of the self was one of the major consequences of the *Achsenzeit*. One learned to observe oneself, to look for or even seek transformation, often of a moral character. Concepts of sin, defilement, shame, and guilt emerged, and new ways, usually highly ritualized, were found to permit and express purification and repentance. Later on, thanks to the new cultural contacts following on Alexander's conquests, religious worldviews learned to compete with one another, vying for souls and offering conversion from one's native religious identity to another. From now on, religion and *ethnos* would no longer be totally and necessarily identical. A recent collective effort shows, at least within the cultural realm of the Mediterranean and the Near East, the broad spectrum of possibilities for transformation in and of self.[7]

Another dramatic change, perhaps no less important than the one which occurred in the "Axial Age," took place in late antiquity. The self no longer needs

simply to be taken care of (to use Michel Foucault's phrase, "le souci de soi") but also, and in particular, requires to be saved. In the history of thought, no one exemplifies better than Augustine this new perception of the self, and of its transforming needs: repentance, conversion, salvation. No wonder, then, that it is with Augustine that Charles Taylor starts his quest for "the sources of the self."[8] In late antiquity, or rather during the first five centuries of the common era in the Near East and the Mediterranean, various religious movements offered salvation to individuals. Each had a different perception of who and what was in need of salvation, of the nature of this salvation, and of the means to achieve it. But all agreed that the self, if it were to survive, mature, be enriched and completed, was in need of radical transformation, either "interior" or "spatial" — in need, that is, of reform, return, repentance, or exiting the body or the material world. Stoics, Pythagoreans, followers of Isis and tenants of various other Oriental religions, Jews, Gnostics of all stripes, Manichaeans, Mandeans, Zoroastrians — all searched passionately for ways and means to work this alchemical mutation of self.

None were as insistent and successful in this pursuit as the Christians. Jesus Christ himself had undergone the most radical of all transformations: the Son of God had become a man, incarnated in a mortal body. The new theology entailed a new anthropology. If Christ had suffered in his body, the body of man could no longer be considered an appendix to the real self, as it had been, by and large, in Greek philosophies. In contrast to other movements, Christianity offered salvation to all: anyone could model a life after that of the supreme exemplar and be saved through self-transformation. Religious purification became identical to moral progress, and constant spiritual exercise, *askèsis*, became a *conditio sine qua non* for the ascent of the self. In this striving, one was not alone: spiritual direction may not have been a Christian invention, but its development in early Christianity is certainly unique. Acting as a *khalifa* of Christ on earth, as it were, the ancient (*ho gerôn*) in the Egyptian desert played a crucial role in the efforts of the monk to reconstitute his self. In that sense, as a living model of an already accomplished self-transformation, the abbot and spiritual director in early monasticism played a role radically different from that of the philosopher, who is perhaps wiser and older than his students but stands, essentially, at one level with them. The very existence of such monastic frameworks within the civilizational core bears eloquent witness to the new institutional dynamics embodying an altered vision of self. All in all, early Christianity exemplifies in a unique sense the weight religion carries in effecting changes in the conception of self, hence of possible transformation. Between the second and the fourth centuries in the Roman Empire, it is in the domain of religion rather than culture that a radical change occurred, with immediate implications for evolving notions of self and its transcendence. This far-reaching reformulation of anthropology had effects in all other domains: transformation in self transforms all contexts for selves.

Sources and Language

What sources do we have to work with? Subjects speak of themselves, and of the self, in many narrative genres. We have no access to the "raw" moment of transformation; what we have is a wealth of textualized materials, in which these usually rare

and rather special moments are reported, remembered, reconstructed, replayed, invented, canonized, or anathemized by particularly gifted or driven individuals. In some cultures we see a striking plethora of such texts in various genres — autobiography, for example, in the Tibetan texts that Janet Gyatso analyzes. Elsewhere, we have relatively sparse or compressed discourses, which may move from the atomic individual toward the mythic, as in Greek tragedy. Lyrical poetry may itself embody the transformative process and constitute its goal, as in the Tamil poems to Śiva discussed by David Shulman: to sing the poem is both to conjure up the presence of the deity within the self, and to be transformed. Sometimes theatrical performances take a seemingly private domain into the public space, dramatically outlining the social, cultural, or ritual significance of such experience — and also infusing it with the proper cultural codes. In all cases, the language used demands careful hearing, for transformation, like everything else in life, has expressive texture, where the deeper meaning usually lies. We need to notice the linguistic markers of each text — the shifters, syntactical patterns, the words and meters — that comprise a self (as in Charles Malamoud's Vedic example), and the persistent metaphors of transformation: ascent, descent, dissent, melting, fusing, splitting, swimming, flying, remembering, forgetting, and various forms of inner battle. Sometimes the language of transformation achieves an overpowering lyricism, as in the Sufi descriptions of the dark wind filling the blood vessels in the body of the practitioner, as Sara Sviri shows in her study.

Autobiography suggests, at least, the presence of the transforming subject who remembers the sequence of his or her own process, with greater or lesser accuracy, in greater or lesser degrees of persuasiveness. But many of our sources are twice or thrice removed from this first-person reporting and have social goals, often explicitly stated, as in hagiography — where the transformed saint or holy man is presented as an exemplar or model for imitation. At times we can trace the stages of cultural patterning around the early narrative core, as in the case of Symeon of Emessa, the Fool for Christ's sake: the relatively concise report by Evagrius Scholasticus in the sixth century is remarkably expanded a century later by Leontius of Neapolis, who has produced a luxuriant, fully narrativized hagiography. This progression, as Guy Stroumsa argues, follows a normative logic in which the transformation of self mimics insanity in the public arena. In private, however, the text seems to point to Symeon's complete control of his inner self: so what looks externally like radical transformation may, in fact, be meant to protect the hidden core self, which is also in a profound sense more "real." This peculiar form of splitting, which presumes a strong axiological distinction between true and false levels of self, along Bergsonian (or Winnicottian) lines, may spill across genre and religious boundaries: we find similar patterns among the Malamatiya Sufis and in the radical Hindu praxis of the Pāśupata worshipers of Śiva. Even possession may take an analogous form — the virtuoso monk or shaman may seem, in the eyes of his observers, to have undergone a transformation and to speak with a new voice, while on a deeper level he remains or thinks he remains in full mastery of his own inner being. Indeed, whenever we speak of transformation, we need to ask: How much of the person, or the self, is present at any point? Which part becomes transformed? Is one part more real or said to be more real than another? Is there some systemic level of the person that constitutes a whole?

Toward an Analytical Program

This volume is not an essay in comparative taxonomy. Yet for us to compare at all, certain recurrent issues and concerns of apparently universal relevance need to be defined. In all the essays collected here, it is possible to isolate and explore what we will call issues of directionality, of integration, and of voicing. This is to say: ritualized transformation almost invariably moves the subject in a patterned direction, always informed by the metaphysics or semantics of the active cultural matrix. In this movement, the internal economy of the self or selves undergoing these processes comes into play, often very explicitly and self-consciously; transformation, even a disturbing or disintegrating one, of the sort we are exploring requires a strong notion of system. Moreover, the integration of transformative processes within the unfolding self, or of the self within these processes, always proceeds via the integration of these momentous events into the wider structured spheres, with their salient and repeated themes, emphases, and tensions. In a sense, as we argued earlier with reference to ritual, the notion of self-transformation is itself an evident channel for precisely such necessary attempts within culture to integrate and continually reorganize the disparate components of experience and vision.

These processes are always eloquently embodied in language of one kind or another—from the highly articulate testimony of retrospective spiritual autobiographies to the synchronic musicality of many rituals of dance, exorcism, or masking. The self-transforming subject speaks or sings—perhaps in multiple voices, at least as many as comprise the habitual polyphony of our inner worlds. These voices may be internally differentiated, even hierarchized—one, usually the newest, breaking through to consciousness under the weight of inner change, may be experienced as, at last, more "real" than others, but also as somehow alien; again, we touch on the problem of internal organization. Such voicing demands a hearing. Building on the work of Barbara and Dennis Tedlock that appears in our earlier volume on the culture of dreams and dreaming,[9] we have learned to look in each case for the linguistic or supralinguistic markers ("evidentials" in the reporting of dreams) that reveal the workings of these voices. At any moment we can ask: Who is it that is speaking? How many parts, how many voices, how many selves? What is the texture of the communication, and what does it communicate? How is it set off from other linguistic media? Who is meant to be listening?

Direction, integration, voicing: each case we examine confronts these parameters that could be said to constitute, in part, the frame for transformative process. There are, of course, other pressing issues as well—ontic concerns, for example (Which "selves" are more real in the subject's experience?); questions of temporality (In what time mode does transformation transpire? How does this mode relate to everyday, empirical perceptions of time?); problems of the presenting surface and its textures, as when notions or practices of masking are in play; and so on. A complete comparative model—which we have deliberately chosen *not* to elaborate, fearing its potentially constrictive effect on our discussions—would no doubt map all such factors onto the cross-cultural analytic field. But the few parameters we have outlined already allow us to observe certain surprising broad similarities that cut across diverse civilizations with respect to one or more sets of issues.

Take, for example, the basic distinction in direction and orientation that emerges from several of the essays. The example of Symeon just cited reveals movement along a vertical axis: Symeon acts and looks like an animal—a vertical descent from humanity—although innerly he strives to lead the *angelikos bios,* a powerful ascent. Most of the examples we have cited so far range themselves along this vertical axis: sages, gurus, or saints are presented as models for imitation precisely because they seem or claim to have transcended the boundaries of normal human existence. In certain cases they go far beyond even this description and become divinities, as with Oedipus (at Colonus) and Hercules, as discussed by Margalit Finkelberg and Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier. Self-apotheosis of this sort may even be the declared existential goal of systems of transformation, as is usual in south India.

Side by side with this vertical axis, however, there is a potential horizontal one that moves the subject through various still-human metamorphoses. Perhaps the most prevalent examples, in various cultures, involve transsexuality, the exchange of one gender for another, as we see in Wendy Doniger's essay on the Indian epics and in Cristiano Grottanelli's examples from late antiquity. The Tamil male poet-devotees who delight in speaking with a female voice and in imagining themselves fully present in a female persona also partake of this mode, which appears to offer them privileged access to some form of divine experience.[10] Moshe Idel's tale from Galilee shows us a man so deeply engrossed in meditation on female beauty that, paradoxically, he breaks through the *vertical* barrier to ultimate, divine experience—in complete agreement with the Platonic model articulated by Diotima in the *Symposium.* This example suggests a third, consistently conflated, type combining the vertical and horizontal axes—as when a male demon possesses a female subject and speaks from her mouth with a male voice (or vice versa).

Again we see the unique subcategory, reflected in the organization of these essays, constituted by matters of possession, which often reveal an amazing complexity of part-selves enfolded inside other part-selves, in various degrees of paralysis and inner movement. To put it crudely: part of me is not me. (Can all of me be not me?) Moshe Sluhovsky's study of European Catholic materials draws out the differentiated theology implicit in this condition: "bad" possession involves a spirit to be exorcised by ritual means, while "good" possession by the divine spirit enables prophecy and mystical vision. Both forms, however, share the same morphology, as Sluhovsky shows—so techniques of differentiation become entirely a matter of social regulation. Far more complicated are the interpenetrating voices that speak from Babylonian magical bowls from the Sasanian period, presented by Shaul Shaked: as he remarks, people seem to live simultaneously with many distinct and competing conceptions of self (functional, magical, astrological, demonic), even as today we seem to move easily among various "selves" (scientific, astrological, psychoanalytic, expressive, and so on); which self comes to the fore at any given moment is determined by context. Moreover, many of these selves are highly ambiguous and difficult to distinguish; they can be benevolent or malevolent, threatening or propitious. In the Sasanian case—as in others studied here—self-transformation thus speaks to the reconfigurations of any such multivocal person, inhabited by personae of indeterminate provenance. The magical texts, moreover, reflect only one side of what was clearly a rich praxis of ritual self-transformation, including, in particular, rituals of healing.

Indeed, healing, broadly understood, could well be seen as the logic and motivating power behind many of the phenomena studied here. The term includes the notion of sanity as well as physical well-being: in case after case, transformation actually means the healing movement toward a wider sanity, even if this looks, on the surface, like insanity. Often it is the everyday world of routinized existence that is perceived as pathologically insane. In any case, the very concept of healing in the context of self-transformation entails concerns of integration and voice. Does multiple voicing create a person who is whole? If so, how do the various, perhaps conflicting, voices cohere, interact, exchange echoes? Does failure of multivocality—the reduction of the internal chorus of autonomous voices to a singularity—signal the breakdown of a viable being, the blocking or emptying or impoverishment of inner aliveness to a point that requires ritual transformation of self?

Death, we tend to assume, is the ultimate and universal illness in need of healing. Rituals of self-transformation are the medicine a religious culture offers its subjects, in varying degrees of optimism about the potential for a lasting cure. Wai-yee Li demonstrates how stories of self-transformation in China focus on the paradoxical modes of immortality available to the lucky—or sometimes not so lucky—practitioner. Metamorphoses are readily achieved, but the emotional and psychological reality of the transformed individual often falls far short of the imagined goal of a stable, immortal self. A certain poignancy and wistfulness seem always to accompany these tales, almost as if a note of skepticism, perhaps Buddhist in its origin, becomes merged with the Daoist hopes and techniques for effecting an irreversible change in human life. But China is not alone in this respect: many of the cases examined in this volume speak eloquently of highly ritualized programs of self-transformation aimed at healing the mortal, all-too-limited human subject from his or her terminal illness. In this sense, performance of Greek tragedy is also, at heart, a healing process, as Aristotle argued when he spoke of catharsis—though the self-transformation effected by viewing a Greek or Latin tragedy is by no means "only" cathartic and may involve far-reaching experiences at the limit of sanity, as Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier shows.

Space and Borders

Let us say it again before we turn to further experiments and abstractions: self-transformation has direction, culturally ruled or determined. It normally assumes a systemic, integrative aspect, integral to healing. And it speaks in voices—a remarkable and often dissonant polyphony—that are rich in texture, heavy with the urgency and inertia of inner movement in relation to exfoliated, external forms. This formulation suggests another necessary dimension for analysis, one relating to the existence of boundaries—inner, outer, or some combination of these two—and of space, a metaphysics of motion through space differentially located and imagined. Let us try to state these matters in relation, once again, to questions of system and patterns of coherence among autonomous or disparate parts.

Personal transformation need not go as far as turning oneself into a god, or devolving oneself into a demon or an animal, or even switching gender. It may mean, at root, a substantial reorganization or restructuring of the self—in some sense, the

same self that forms the point of departure. But even in the latter case, which presumes a high degree of continuity and some systemic organization, the process is often marked by strong reflexive elements: one privileged inner spectator sometimes stands, as it were, outside or above the self, observing and isolating parts of it as subjects for transformation. These parts may appear utterly alien—a demon, another persona, a congealed or frozen or dead fragment of the person—or they may seem all too familiar, and hence in need of change. In any case, the process as a whole regularly entails potential splitting and recombination, sometimes to the point of bringing to the surface a shocking multiplicity of living personae, as we have seen.

In our earlier work on dream cultures, we suggested (following Moshe Idel) a typological distinction between personalities that are "centrifugal"—relatively loosely organized, with subtle and fairly easy transitions across internal boundaries, and between self and world—and those of a more "centripetal" character, which are more strictly delimited and defined and also more starkly set off from the surrounding external contexts. This distinction has implications for the processes of self-transformation discussed in this volume. Centrifugal configurations seem to be correlated with the more gradual modes of working upon an always changing, usually unstable self, with the concomitant qualities of poignant paradoxicality and recursivity coloring the cultural vision of inner change. Centripetal transformation tends to the conflictual, to experiences of dramatic rupture and irreversible movement into a new identity or ontic domain, to strong attempts at exorcism and a renewal of clearly articulated boundaries, both within and without. Moreover, centripetal transformation is far more likely to overtake the individual in a mode that is potentially coercive, against his or her own inclinations, as we sometimes see in stories of conversion. This same distinction may apply to the social and institutional domains, for example, in relation to the integration of heresies and heterodoxies into the social order. In centrifugal societies, as in centrifugal selves, it is not easy to find oneself *outside* the collective. The collective fabric of identity and its axiological correlates stretch and bend to create room for innovating modes of being. Centripetal institutionalization of identity borders tends, by way of contrast, to become rigid, brittle, and exclusive. Needless to say, these two poles are not meant to be mutually exclusive; mixed types, of extraordinary richness and culturally specific patterns, abound, indeed will almost always be the norm.

Such forms of modeling pose themselves in terms of energy and motion that transpire, of course, within a structured space. Focusing on the latter dimension, we can also think in terms of a broad divide between those cultures of transformation that seem to view the self as a locus or agent of expansion and plenitude, continuously filling itself up and enriching itself with its own possibilities, and those that confront a self that shrinks or contracts out of its own surface under the impact of an overriding metaphysical ideal (the soul, the deity, and so on). This is a different way of framing our problematic, one that locates spaciousness in distinct domains. An expansive "self" opens further under the impact of regulated transformation, which tends to enhance its internal resonances and (especially) dissonances, to intensify or accelerate movement, to extend or knead the boundaries of identity and experience, looping and twisting these boundaries through one another without discard-

ing earlier personae. Space for transformation is, in other words, firmly present within self. In contrast, other systems conceive an empirical self as an extrusion toward surface from a generative but perhaps empty core; it is this surface self that is to be systematically reduced, impoverished, and transcended in favor of the nonself (or, what amounts to the same thing, a "true self") of far greater metaphysical depth and urgency, where space exists. A dualism of spirit and body is far more likely to impose itself on a subject operating within such a system. Much ascetic practice also emerges naturally out of this second class, although it would be possible to argue over whether classical Yoga, for example, belongs here or in the more fluid and diffuse model of self-expansion. And once again, phenomenologically we find surprising, mixed variants (thus in fifteenth-century south Indian poetry, an expansive and fluid yet coherent, bounded self modeled around an empty core).[11] In either case, when we focus on the structured space required for self-transformation, we find ourselves asking less about the possible composition of an innermost "core" self, if such exists, than about points of potential blockage and immobility. What processes does a culture put in place to release a self that gets stuck (dries out, turns heavy or opaque, goes mad, becomes monotonal, stops transforming)? Many of the particular mechanisms studied in the individual essays here seem primarily aimed at precisely such emergencies, which may well be everyday affairs. Self-transformation, that is, is largely a form of healing that removes a block.

Echoes

This volume is a further stage in a collective enterprise aimed at studying the latent anthropologies that underlie different cultures and civilizations; we have hitherto relied largely on particularly expressive but somewhat neglected modes such as riddles and dreams. Two previous volumes organized around these themes have already appeared.[12] In both cases, we looked for implicit metaphysics and the intuitive semantics of culturally fashioned modes of action and thought. Formal features of genre and mode were studied in relation to powerful thematic and existential concerns specific to each religious culture. For riddles, we concentrated on three interlocking sets of expressive questions: those relating to the articulation and composition of identity, to primary cosmological understandings, and to the linguistic morphology in which such matters are presented to awareness. Riddles and related enigmatic genres beautifully encapsulate these concerns, which release their secrets under analytic probing—not simply of the visible form but in particular of its contextual embeddedness. A special kind of knowledge comes to the surface through the mechanism of the riddle, a knowledge that may change the world. Similarly, the universal activity of dreaming—which we tend, perhaps wrongly, to view as a singularly private domain—becomes subject to highly specific cultural configurations as soon as the dream is told, to self or other. Our explorations of distinct dream cultures reveal the close connections between dream reporting and the thematic and semantic exigencies of particular cultures. In dreaming itself, but above all in the linguistic sociality that arises when a dream is told, a culture offers us a fragment of its own autobiography. Both riddles and dreams speak to and from various layers of culturally

patterned selves and reflect distinct, implicit anthropologies. First-person pronouns—or, rather, what these pronouns might mean or, better, evoke or suggest—are everywhere cultural artifacts. Usually, a peculiar conceptual and experiential instability inheres in their usage, as linguists know.[13] The present collection thus seeks to extend our investigations, still in a comparative vein, to the dynamic mechanisms of self-formation and transformation—perhaps the cultural act par excellence.

The essays are arranged in accordance with major thematic trajectories suggested by the materials, seen in a comparative light. For this reason, essays dealing in civilizations remote from one another have been juxtaposed. We begin with alternative mappings, or rival internal economies, of the self, as the cultural foundation for transformation. Each such map is rich in semantic content and dynamic in orientation. From here we move to varieties of possession, including sets of various demonic and/or divine personae inhabiting the self, as well as one famous case of possession by madness. The final section brings together models that take the subject far beyond the empirical point of departure, in a self-transcending movement. Within each of these sections, the essays follow a rough chronological sequence.

We met in April of 1998 at Kibbutz Ginosar on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, under the auspices of the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University and the Einstein Forum in Potsdam. We hope that the essays collected here evoke something of the gentle liveliness that pervaded our discussions and suggest the range of issues that emerged as future goals. We make no claim to completeness: most of the world's cultures are not represented here, and major work of integration remains to be done, both on the cross-cultural and the intracultural levels: Is there a systematic syntax of culturally specific transformation? A morphology? A poetics? Can we speak of isomorphic, cross-cultural patterns of transforming—for example, in cases when a mode is borrowed by one culture from another? Or is transformation itself radically transformed? Is transformation inherently subversive, or may it be at times profoundly homeostatic, a method or mode of stabilizing and control? What happens if transformation goes too far?

Notes

1. See the essay by Margalit Finkelberg in this volume.
2. See Cancik-Lindemaier in this volume.
3. See Wai-yee Li in this volume.
4. James 1902.
5. See Handelman in this volume.
6. Mauss 1950. See more recently Collins, Lukes, and Carrithers 1985.
7. Assmann and Stroumsa 1999.
8. Taylor 1989. More recently, see the volume edited by Porter 1996, on notions of self from the Renaissance to the European present.
9. See Barbara Tedlock and Dennis Tedlock in Shulman and Stroumsa 1999.
10. See discussion in Shulman in this volume.
11. This is Annamayya of Tirupati: see Shulman 2001.
12. See Hasan-Rokem and Shulman 1996 and Shulman and Stroumsa 1999.
13. Silverstein 1976; Crapanzano 1996.

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I

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES OF THE SELF

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CHARLES MALAMOUD

A Body Made of Words and Poetic Meters

The problem I would like to examine is quite simple, in a way: How does the sacrifice affect the sacrificer? What happens to the sacrificer, to his self, during the sacrificial process? In what respect, and to what extent, is he modified by it?

Let it be clear that I am not looking for psycho-physiological answers to these questions. I am not trying to trace the measurable transformations to which a human organism is submitted when exposed to the material conditions and to the mental stress involved in the sacrificial process. I am trying to find not what happens "really" but what is supposed to happen. I wish to understand what is taught by the dogmatic texts of the Veda in a language we can very well call metaphorical. Of course, it is not impossible to draw some hints from these texts that could be used for a scientific interpretation. But I don't think that effort could take us very far. In any case, we should not refrain from trying to understand the consistency of the injunctions of Vedic discourse on the aim and means of the sacrificial rite.[1]

We feel entitled to raise such a general and naive question when we read passages such as *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* I 1, 1, 4 sqq. It is an explanation of the formula the sacrificer has to pronounce when he vows to submit himself to the observances, the *vrata*, he has to keep during the performance. One of these observances is to speak a language of truth. He says: now I go from untruth to truth, *idam aham anṛtāt satyam upaimi*. The ŚB says in the same passage: the man who tells what is untrue is *amedhya*, unfit to sacrifice.[2] "So the sacrificer must speak only truth, *sa vai satyam eva vadet*. By this *vrata* he leaves the world of men and goes to the world of the gods. He becomes *amānuṣa iva*, not human, so to speak." But when the sacrifice is completed, the sacrificer puts an end to his vow, he dismisses it and comes back to profane life. One expects the symmetrical formula, but, says the ŚB, as it would be improper for him to say: "Now I go from truth to untruth," let him say: "Now I am just what I am, *idam ahaṃ ya evāsmi so'smi*." That is: "he becomes again human (*tad u khalu punar mānuṣo bhavati*)."

The *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* VII 23 sqq. deals with the same problem from another angle: when a *kṣatriya* undergoes the *dīkṣā*,[3] the consecration preliminary to sacri-

fice, he becomes a Brāhmaṇa (*sa hi dīkṣamāṇa eva brāhmaṇatām upaiti*). This is good in a way, but he is afraid lest the deities and and various powers that define him as a *kṣatriya* (for instance, the god Indra, the Vedic meter *triṣṭubh*, glory and fame, *yaśas*, *kīrti*) abandon him, saying : he is different from us, he becomes a *brāhmaṇa* (more precisely, he becomes the *brahman*, he identifies himself with the principle, the essence, of the brāhmaṇa class). In order to prevent this loss and this exclusion, he makes an offering before the *dīkṣā* with an appropriate prayer: may I become a *brāhmaṇa* and still retain all the items of my kṣatriyahood. Being who I am, I offer my sacrifice (*yo'smi sa san yaje*). When the sacrifice is finished, he uses the formula: now I am just who I am.

It is not my intention to examine what "truth" and "untruth" mean in this context.[4] Let me just mention that the Mīmāṃsakas investigated the topic thoroughly.[5] I just wonder: if once the sacrifice is finished the sacrificer finds himself in the same state as before it started (and in the Ait B version this is precisely what he wishes), why should one sacrifice at all? What is it all about? There are at least two answers to this question. Both of them have been given their theoretical shape by the Mīmāṃsakas: (1) one has to offer sacrifices because it is so prescribed by the Veda. Doing what is prescribed is *dharma*, and that is a good enough reason; (2) sacrifice provides *apūrva*, something new, unprecedented. If we come back to what the Vedic treatises on sacrifice say, we understand that this new, unseen effect is achieved through the construction of a new self, actually a new body for the sacrificer, a self that subsists in a way even after the sacrificer has come back to his presacrificial, human, and profane self.

I would like to show that this process is linked with the Vedic idea of image and image making.

While it is true that the gods are not represented by material objects that could be considered their icons, we do find descriptions of objects that actually *are* images.[6] In general, however, they represent the sacrificer, although this man is himself present on the spot. Let us consider two of these images, a bundle of grass and a statuette. One of the implements of the sacrificial ritual is a bundle of grass (*prastara)* manipulated like a kind of doll by the priests. At the end of the ceremony it is thrown into the fire as if it were an offering. It is explicitly addressed and spoken of as the sacrificer (ŚB I 8, 3, 11).[7] In the very prestigious ritual called *agnicayana*, to which I shall turn presently, a small golden statuette must be placed, along with some other objects, such as a lotus flower and a living tortoise, at the base of a large brick altar. This statuette represents a man with his arms upstretched along the sides of his head (ŚB VII, 4, 11–44). This is the attitude of the sacrificer himself when the priests measure his height, from the tip of his fingers down to his feet, at the very beginning of the ceremony. They measure him because several important implements of the sacrifice must match that measurement: for instance, the post to which the victim is tied (MS III 9, 2; ĀpŚS VII 2, 13) or the central pillar of the *sadas*, a hut erected in the middle of the sacrificial ground (ŚB III 6, 1, 6; KŚS VII 5, 25 sq.). It is in reference to these facts that Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa X 2, 2, 6 says: "He measures by the man with upstretched arms; for the sacrifice is a man, and by him everything here is measured; and that is his highest measure when he stands with upstretched arms." The sacrificer is the man, *puruṣa*, par excellence; and "man" is also the name of the golden statuette.

These representations of the sacrificer are meant, as we can guess, to recall two fundamental principles of the Vedic theory of sacrifice, namely, that the real victim is the sacrificer himself, and that the whole procedure of the sacrifice develops around the sacrificer and in reference to him: *puruṣo vai yajñaḥ*, "the sacrifice indeed is the man" (KauṣB XVII 7).

The introductory or first phase of the sacrifice is the consecration, *dīkṣā*, of the sacrificer. It consists of the progressive transformation of this man into a being fit to be an offering, a *havis* (MS III 6, 2). The rest of the ceremony, that is, the sacrifice proper, consists in introducing a substitute for the sacrificer in the role of *havis* (MS III 6, 2; KS XXIII, 6; ŚB XI 2, 3, 6). Now this substitute is not only the victim or the cake or the soma draught which eventually will be thrown into the fire. This substitute is the whole sacrificial process, the whole sacrificial construction. According to the wording of the texts, the sacrifice, being a substitute for the sacrificer, is not only his equivalent, but also his image, his *pratimā* (cf. ŚB XI 1, 8, 3 sq.), a term that etymologically means "corresponding measure." It is the most usual word for "image," or "portrait."

I must insist on this double aspect of Vedic sacrifice: sacrifice means loss, renunciation, giving away, destruction of the things and beings used as oblations. The Veda is very clear about this: it says again and again that one destroys, literally kills, cereals when one grinds them; one kills soma when one crushes the stalks of this plant to extract its juice, just as one kills the animal victim, although these killings are not to be considered murders (for instance, ŚB I 2, 2, 1). As to the sacrificer, he abandons a part of himself and therefore shrinks, so to speak, when he undergoes the consecration. But at the same time, by building this counterpart, this image of himself, he is supposed to make a world or to create an open space for himself, a place in heaven. This is the compensation he will get when he dies. But to achieve this he has to construct and to set in motion the sacrificial device of which he is the center and module. As a consequence of this theory, the sacrificial ritual is repeatedly described and explained by the metaphor of the human body: each implement, each series of acts or texts constitutive of the sacrifice, is presented as a specific part or function of the human organism (AS XI 3; KauṣB XVII 7; ŚB XI 1, 6, 31).

Although icons as material artifacts appear but rarely on the sacrificial ground, we often meet the notion of a work of art or craftsmanship in the Veda. The word for it is *śilpa*. Generally, not always, it designates an object which is the image of a different object (not the reflection of itself). A *śilpa* is supposed to be beautiful and to arouse admiration. Sometimes this word designates the skill itself. Here are a few examples. (1) When the consecration of the sacrificer begins, the officiating priests spread two skins of black antelope in front of him and recite over them: "You are, both of you, two images, two *śilpas*, of the verses and of the chants of the Veda" (TS VI 1, 3, 1; KS XXIII 3; ŚB III 2, 1, 5 sq.; ĀpŚS X 8, 15 sq.). Actually, the skin of the black antelope is spotted: the white hairs are the *śilpa* of the verses, the black hairs, the *śilpa* of the chants. (According to ŚB III 2, 1, 1, these two skins are also the image, *rūpa*, of the two worlds, sky and earth.) ŚB III 2, 1, 5 adds this definition: the *śilpa* is what provides the corresponding form (*pratirūpa*) of something (*yad vai pratirūpaṃ tac chilpam*). In this case the *śilpa* is the visual transposition of a model consisting of sounds. By touching these hairs, the sacrificer makes his self enter the verses and the

chants. In this preliminary phase of the ritual, when the sacrificer is supposed to be an embryo, the metric schemes of Vedic poetry are a protective envelope for him, actually a womb, in conformity with an etymology that derives *chandas*, "poetic meter," from the root *chand*, "to cover" (TS V 6, 6, 1). (2) Ait B VII 27 provides us with a list of examples of *śilpa:* the image of an elephant, a beautiful cup, a piece of cloth, a chariot. Although these last three examples do not fit the definition of *śilpa* as an image (unless we consider each of these objects as the reproduction of a model), Sāyaṇa's commentary on this passage explains that *śilpas* are produced by workers (*karmakāra)* to create admiration and wonder (*āścarya*), by imitation (*anukṛti*) of divine *śilpa.* Now these wonderful divine *śilpa* are of two kinds. First are the cosmic masterpieces, such as the system of celestial luminaries, the craftsmanship of which enables the cosmogonic god Prajāpati or Kaśyapa to stabilize the earth and to decorate the sky (KS XXXVII 9; TA I 7, 1); one prays to this god to bestow such splendor on the sacrificer, literally, to anoint him with it. Second, the Vedic poems and chants are themselves *śilpas,* or the *śilpa* is the beauty in them. So we have to understand that the antelope skins are *śilpas* because they are images or symbols or icons of the Veda, the Veda being itself made of *śilpa,* although the Veda is in no way an imitation of anything else (cf. Sāyaṇa *ad* Ait B, *loc cit.*).

One specific set of hymns in the Ṛg-Veda (and especially the Nābhānediṣṭha hymn ṚS X 61,1) is designated by *śilpa* (KauṣB XXV 12 sq.). These hymns, *śilpas* par excellence, are to be recited at a certain point of the soma sacrifice;[8] in these circumstances, the verses of these hymns are grouped in triplets. Why so? Because, says KauṣB XXIX 5, the *śilpa* as such, the work of art, is threefold: it includes dance (*nṛtya*), singing (*gīta*), and music (*vādita*). So we have to understand that the visual arts, which are referred to in the definition, and the examples of *śilpa* just given are but imitations or consequences of the arts based on sound. What allows us to draw this conclusion, I think, is the fact that a much later text, the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* III 2, 1–8, says that the future sculptor or image maker, *śilpin,* must first master the principles of dance, singing, and instrumental music.[9]

Śilpa, understood as the beauty that lies in the Vedic texts, can be extracted from its original frame and transferred to other receptacles. This is what we must deduce from texts like JaiB I 263: there is, it says (and this is a favorite topic in this literature), a fixed correspondence between social classes or orders (*varṇa*) and the various meters of Vedic poetry. Thus the meter called *jagatī* (verses of four lines, twelve syllables in each line) is linked to or symbolic of the *vaiśya,* the peasants; the meter *triṣṭubh* (four lines, eleven syllables in each line) is linked to the *kṣatriya,* the warriors; the meter *gāyatrī* (three lines, eight syllables in each line) is the meter of the brāhmaṇas. These correspondences are just an aspect of the propensity of the Vedic authors to classify and establish connections between all their taxonomies. Still we are told that in the course of the ceremony explained there, the cantor extracts the *śilpa* of the meters linked to the peasants and the warriors and anoints the meter of the brāhmaṇas and the whole class of the brāhmaṇas with it. Or the cantor fixes the *śilpa* thus transferred on the brahman just as one fixes a wheel to the axis of a chariot (JaiB II 191). We learn from another passage that the cosmogonic god Prajāpati, in order to impose the supremacy of Indra over the other gods, gives him a gar-

land made of two groups of poems: they are called the invincible, all-winning *śilpas* of Indra (PB XVI 4, 1, 3, 8, 9).

Now the *śilpas* in the Veda are not only things of beauty. According to the Ait B, in the passage I have just discussed, sacrifice can be described as a means for the sacrificer to transform himself into a *śilpa*, a work of art. These are the effects of the ritual: the sacrificer gets a new body, a true self with which he will be able to go up to the sky, where he will occupy or at least mark the free space he has made for himself there. He acquires this new self, this *ātman*, by the recitation of these poems called *śilpas*. These *śilpas* effect a metamorphosis in him and compose for him this perfectly equipped and refined new self. They are an *ātmasaṃskṛti*, a perfection of the self. This perfect self is described as *chandomaya*, made of *chandas*, of poetic meters. The phrase occurs quite frequently in similar contexts. For instance, Ait B I 22: "Having come into existence as composed of verses and chants of the Veda, as composed of immortality, he who knows thus and who, knowing thus, sacrifices with this sacrificial rite (*ya etena kratunā yajate*), goes to the deities." Another passage: "The officiating priests achieve to perfection another self (*anyam ātmānam*) for him, to wit, this very sacrifice, made of verses, chants, formulas, oblations (ŚB IV 3, 4, 5). So he becomes himself, his own self in the yonder world" (ŚB IV 3, 4, 6). The same *Brāhmaṇa* does not hesitate to draw a somewhat puzzling conclusion from this transmutation of the sacrificer into a self made of words and meters: the sacrificer whose self is so sublimated must offer his sacrifice to his own self (he must be an *ātmayājin*) rather than to the gods (ŚB XI 2, 6, 13).

The very existence of this kind of formula and the ideal of replacing the various parts of one's body with elements or aspects of the Veda reveal or confirm the fundamental affinity of man with speech. Various, rather surprising, proofs or reasons are given to explain this affinity and this longing. For instance the very name of man, *puruṣa*, has three syllables; and the word for "syllable" is *akṣara*, which also consists of three syllables (PB XX 14, 8). More seriously, Vedic texts repeatedly explain that man is able or bound to give a verbal reality to whatever he does or feels, to whatever happens to him. It is this characteristic that enables him to build a purely verbal *ātman* for himself. Actually, man — in fact, a man born in one of the first three *varṇas*, or perhaps a man born from brāhmaṇa parents — is linked to, or rather identified with, speech and the Vedic text from the very beginning: we learn from BĀU VI 4, 25 that as soon as a son is born, the father takes him on his lap and whispers in his ear, "You are Veda," *vedo'si*.[10] This, I think, can be connected with the Upaniṣadic formula *tat tvam asi*, "You are that." A ritual forerunner, so to speak, of this *mahāvākya* — a primary metaphysical statement — and of the identity *ātman-brahman* (with a shift in the meaning of *brahman*) can be seen in the father's words as he calls his son Veda: the idea that by a ritual procedure one acquires a body consisting of the words of the Veda is, as it were, an anticipation of the Upaniṣadic notion that the individual self is in truth none other than the universal absolute — the passage from one conception to the other, from ritual action to metaphysical knowledge, being rendered possible by the polysemy of *brahman*, which designates the enigmatic content of the Vedic text and is also a name for the Absolute.

The gods, for their part, acquire substantial reality through their verbal bodies.

In fact, if we read accurately the Vedic treatises on sacrifice (for instance, ŚB IX 4, 2, 23), we can distinguish three phases in the ritual biography of a god: (1) The names of the god are greater than the god himself; they precede him. The sacrificer propitiates and gratifies these names when he inserts them, at the right moment, in an appropriate exclamation, the *nivid* (Ait B III 10 sq.). (2) It is when an oblation is offered to him that he becomes, so to speak, real. (3) Finally, the god acquires a proper self when he is identified with a specific part or aspect of the Vedic text. For instance, we learn from TS V 4, 1, 1 that the god Indra is always defeated by the demons as long as he has no body, no *tanū*. He eventually has the vision of ṚS II 12: the verses of this hymn become *indratanū*, Indra's body or person. This vision enables him to acquire a body, or rather, as the text says, to fill his self with a body—a body, mind you, that is nothing but a poem.

Let me go back once more to the topic of Vedic aniconism. The most challenging element is the mysterious structure built at the eastern edge of the sacrificial ground for an especially solemn form of soma ritual. This edifice is called Agni, the name of fire or the god of fire, or else, more explicitly, a noun of action, "the piling of Agni," *agniciti*, *agnicayana* (the last part of the compound is derived from the root *ci*, "to pile up"). On the formal characteristics of this structure and the procedure of the piling, I refer to the admirable book, an exhaustive encyclopaedia, in fact, by Frits Staal.[11] Let me just say that the general shape of this edifice, of this Agni, seen from above, is that of a bird, eagle, or falcon, with its wings outstretched yet slightly bent, to suggest the contraction and expansion repeated in the movement of flying (ŚB X 2, 1, 7).[12] This image consists of five layers of bricks, 200 bricks in each layer. This sum of 1,000 is a minimum to which one sticks in actual practice, as can still be observed. The texts mention much larger structures, with many more bricks, but the number of layers is always five. The basic brick is a square the side of which is one-fifth of the total height of the sacrificer with his arms upstretched. To fill in the general shape, one must also use rectangular and triangular bricks. Their dimensions derive from the dimension of the basic square brick. The rules for the calculations and measurements are elaborately explained in the *Śulbasūtras*, texts considered to be the origin of Indian geometry.[13] All the dimensions of this building are multiples or fractions of the height of that man, the sacrificer. In principle, this structure is used just once, since the rite itself consists in the very act of piling it up. The Agni is not a sculpture, since it consists in fitting together discrete prefabricated elements. Nor is it architecture, since the builders don't have to figure out how to leave empty spaces within it. It is a full, compact mass, without any interstices, with one exception: in the middle of the layers, some space is occupied by what is called "naturally perforated bricks." Actually, they are not bricks but small porous pebbles; air is supposed to circulate through them. The real bricks fall into two classes. Some bricks are set down with recitation and chanting of Vedic verses or formulas, the others silently: their generic name is "space fillers." It normally takes twelve days to complete the piling. This again is a minimum.

In terms of its ritual function, the Agni is an altar. Once it is completed, burning sticks and embers are placed on top of it; offerings of soma are poured into the flames. In this respect, the piling of Agni is a mere preliminary to soma sacrifice. But according to the speculations of the treatises on sacrifice, this altar is also the

materialization of an extremely intricate set of metaphors. It is not the image of a god, but rather the image of a system. In its structure of bricks, this altar is the representation of the complex relationship of identity and difference between the cosmogonic god Prajāpati and the god of fire, Agni, each brick or set of bricks being a piece of solidified, discontinuous fire and, at the same time, a part of the multileveled body of Prajāpati. In its bird shape, it is the image of the *ātman* or one of the *ātmans*, one of the selves of which Prajāpati has had a vision, and which he fashioned in order to be able to master all parts of the world he has created. So there is a remarkable dissociation between the elements and the shape of the whole. Of course, these interpretations of the rite and of the edifice are worked out in the Vedic texts themselves. I must add that several hundred pages are devoted to instructions and explanations on the topic of *agniciti* in these treatises. I must also repeat that the very act of piling is an offering, each brick or set of bricks being considered an oblation. And, most important, a series of sacrificial killings precedes and underlies the piling, since five severed heads of animal victims, including a man's head, must be placed at the base of this altar.[14]

Here, now, are the main features of the relevant myths. They are explained in the texts to provide the "meaning" of this altar and of the whole ritual.

In the beginning, Prajāpati is alone. He is, by himself, the universe. He wishes: "May I become many." He exerts himself and eventually gives rise to the creatures (*prajā*), starting with the gods. But the effort has exhausted him. He is laid out, emptied and broken, threatened by death and therefore threatening with death the beings that have just emerged from him. The time that rules him is a homogeneous "year" of sorts, which simply draws all living beings toward their destruction (ŚB X 4, 3, 2 sq). Prajāpati wishes to reconstitute himself by reabsorbing all creatures (ŚB X 4, 2, 3). He says to Agni, the first among the gods: "Put me back together." If the fire god will agree to reconstitute his creator by reintroducing himself into him and by leading the other gods to do the same, the gods and men will recognize Prajāpati as the son of Agni, and they will call him Agni. The piling of the fire altar is the work accomplished by Agni as a means of fulfilling Prajāpati's desire: condensed and fragmented into cooked clay bricks, he gives new consistency and structure to the body of Prajāpati. This is why the brick edifice, which is Prajāpati, bears in its name a reference to fire, to Agni. "Here then, the father is also the son; because he created Agni, he is the father of Agni; because Agni put him back together, Agni is the father of Prajāpati" (ŚB VI 1, 2, 13). The layers of bricks are the immortal parts of Prajāpati's body. They are also the four cardinal directions plus the zenith, and the five seasons of the Indian year. There is a brick for each "moment" or period of the year—and this year, which is coextensive with the body of a creator so reconstituted, is no longer a death-laden time. It is rather a cycle ritualized by its own rhythms, a cycle that generates immediate immortality for the gods and deferred immortality for humans, at least for humans who know, in their turn, how to construct the fire altar.

Here we must notice, if we follow the order of the text, that the rite which is supposed to represent the events of the myth by material objects and human gestures is in turn projected into the myth. We learn, in effect, from ŚB X 4, 2 that Prajāpati's body, in the myth itself, consists of twice 360 bricks (that is one brick for each day, or one brick for each night, of the year). Prajāpati looks for the best way of arranging

and grouping them and after a long series of trials, of reshufflings, he discovers the most satisfactory solution: twenty-four sets of thirty bricks, thirty being the number of "moments" (*muhūrta)* in one day and night (that means that a *muhūrta* is a period of about forty-eight minutes) and twenty-four the number of half months in a year.

But here comes what is called the *upaniṣad*, that is, the mystery, the enigmatic meaning of the rite. It is added or superimposed on the previous networks of identification and encompasses them. There is a way of counting all the space-filling bricks that results in the sum of 10,800. Now there are also 10,800 *muhūrta* periods in a year. Prajāpati looks around and discovers — no surprise — that all the objects susceptible of enumeration are contained in the Veda. The Veda is made up of 864,000 syllables. We do not know how this number is obtained. The problem for Prajāpati is to find a Vedic meter which would allow him to distribute the total number of Vedic syllables in a way that would appear to be a multiple of 10,800, the number of moments in the year. He succeeds: the right meter exists, the *paṅkti.*[15] The purpose of this wild arithmetic is to show that the discrete units of articulate time (that is, of the year and its subdivisions) can correspond to the units of articulate speech (actually, of the Vedic corpus). The bricks of the altar are the materialization of both. But the correspondence between time and speech or between year and Veda is just a first stage of the mystery. In a second stage, hierarchy appears; speech is the encompassing frame and the ultimate clue. The five layers of bricks are covered by a sixth invisible and all-pervading layer, which is nothing other than language, or speech (ŚB X 1, 4, 7), and the fact that everything has a name — also the fact that the constraints of grammar are everywhere.

Just as men build for themselves a sublimated replica, a sacrificial body made of words and rhythms that is at the same time a thing of beauty and their true self, Prajāpati provides himself with a body made of bricks that are the image of the content and form of the Veda.

Now if we are to deal with the modifications of the self in relation to the sacrificial process, a question remains unanswered. What are the emotions generated by the ritual, and, conversely, what are the passions, fears, and hopes at the origin of these discourses on (Vedic) speech as the ultimate reality? These emotions and passions do not reveal themselves: they are like the severed heads hidden in the depth of the fire altar.[16]

Notes

1. The best exposition of these data is still to be found in Levi 1898.

2. Details in Hillebrandt 1897. According to TBI 2, 1, 15, this formula is uttered by the *yajamāna* in another ritual as well, the sacrificial "session" called *gavāmayana.*

3. On the *dīkṣā*, see Gonda 1965, 314–462.

4. On the texts stating the necessity for the sacrificer to observe the *satyavrata* "vow to stick to the truth" even after the sacrifice is over, cf. Krick 1982, 593ff. On the other hand, according to TB I, 2, 1, 15, the sacrificer is instructed to add this formula: *daivīṃ vācaṃ yacchāmi.* The phrase *vācaṃ yam* usually means "to check one's voice or speech," therefore, "to be silent" — or rather, "to speak only in order to utter the sacred formulas and to refrain from any word which is not a part of the ceremony." The difficulty here is that this *vāc* the sacrificer promises to check is said to be *daivī*, "divine" (Bhaṭṭabhāskara's commentary explains

daivī by *saṃkṛtā*). The phrase *vācaṃ yam* thus seems to mean here, unexpectedly, "to hold the sacred speech," that is, to stick to it (*daivīm eva vācaṃ vadāmi*).

5. Śabara ad *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* III, 4, 12.

6. For instance, the image of night made out of flour (*piṣṭamayī*) in *Atharva-veda-pariśiṣṭa* V 1.

7. One remarkable instruction about the *prastara* is that the *adhvaryu* priest does not throw the whole of it at once. He first extracts one stalk (*ekaṃ tṛṇam*) from the bundle; then he throws all the other stalks into the fire; finally he throws the single stalk he has kept apart. Here is the explanation: The single stalk is that part of the sacrificer's *ātman* that is destined to live the full length of life in this world. The other stalks are his *ātman* that flies up to heaven. These separate parts of the sacrificer's *ātman*, or these separate *ātmans*, must eventually unite. When the single stalk is thrown into the fire, the earthly *ātman* joins what is called "the other *ātman*." It goes to the place this "other *ātman*" has already reached (ŚB I 8, 3, 16).

8. The *śilpa* are to be recited at the third pressing of the one-day soma ritual called Viśvajit (ŚŚS XII 8; ĀśvŚS IX 10, 6–15) and in the middle set of three days of the *dvādaśāha*, a soma ritual that lasts twelve days (ŚŚS XII 3, 15; ĀśvŚS VIII 2, 1 sq.).

9. In the *agnyādheya* ritual, on the eve of the day he will kindle his permanent sacrificial fires, the sacrificer is supposed to spend the whole night without falling asleep. In order to keep him awake, the officiating priests continuously sing and play *vīṇā* for him. The pieces they sing and play are called *śilpa* (ĀpŚS V 8, 1 sq.). Cf. Krick 1982, 261.

10. "Veda" becomes the child's secret name (BĀU, *loc. cit*).

11. Staal 1983. For an analysis of symbolism of the *agnicayana* according to the *Brāhmaṇa*, see Silburn 1955, 49–103. The descriptions by Eggeling 1897, xii–xxxvii, Kane 1941, 1246–55, and Renou 1947, 350 ff., are still extremely useful.

12. This is the standard shape of the altar. Alternative forms are described in the third book of TB and the first book of TĀ.

13. Zellini 1999, 59–107.

14. These heads may be replaced by effigies made out of clay, flour, or metal. Nevertheless, precise instructions as to the human beings whose heads are to be severed for this purpose are given in KS XVI 1, 32; BaudhŚS X 9. Cf. Heesterman 1985, 45–58; Malamoud 1999, 32.

15. A *paṅkti* is a stanza of five lines of eight syllables each. Note that in the Vedic speculations on the symbolic meaning of the *chandas*, only the number of lines and syllables is taken into account; no mention whatever is made of the compulsory arrangement of short and long syllables.

16. But we are informed of the longings and agony of Prajāpati when he desires to "be multiple" and when he fears being abandoned or devoured by his own creatures.

Bibliography

Ait B	Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa	KauṣB	Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa
ĀpŚS	Āpastamba-Śrauta-Sūtra	MS	Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā
Āśv-ŚS	Āśvalāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra	PB	Pañcaviṃśati-Brāhmaṇa
AS	Atharva-Saṃhitā	ṚS	Ṛk-Saṃhitā
BĀU	Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad	ŚB	Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa
BaudhŚS	Baudhāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra	ŚŚS	Śāṅkhāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra
JaiB	Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa	TĀ	Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka
KS	Kāṭhaka-Saṃhitā	TB	Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa
KŚS	Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra	TS	Taittirīya-Saṃhitā

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WAI-YEE LI

On Becoming a Fish

Paradoxes of Immortality and Enlightenment in Chinese Literature

In a famous anecdote from the *Zhuangzi* (ca. fourth century B.C.E.), Zhuangzi and his favorite opponent in disputation, the logician-Sophist Huizi, debate the joy of fish:

> Zhuangzi and Huizi roamed on the bridge over River Hao. Zhuangzi said, "The *tiao* fish come out roaming, free and at ease (*chuyou congrong*). This is the joy of fish." Huizi said, "You are not a fish, how can you know the joy of fish?" Zhuangzi said, "You are not me, how can you know that I do not know the joy of fish?" Huizi said, "I am not you, indeed I do not know you. You, indeed, are not a fish, that you do not know the joy of fish is completely clear." Zhuangzi said, "I beg to seek the beginning. For you to have said 'How can you know the joy of fish,' it is as if you already knew that I know it and thus asked me. I know it by standing on River Hao."[1]

Two modes of knowledge and reasoning are juxtaposed here. Huizi's certainty is based on the logic of difference: analogous distinctions or disjunctions between man and fish, and between himself and Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi, by contrast, plays on the logic of fluid boundaries and claims to overcome division of self and other. Instead of meeting Huizi's logical argument on its own terms, he radically redefines it and affirms intuitive communion: he knows the joy of fish by standing on River Hao. Huizi concedes to not knowing Zhuangzi; Zhuangzi for his part must presume to know Huizi's mind, even as he knows the fish. He attributes motives and emotions to Huizi's question: implicit recognition of Zhuangzi's own knowledge, possibly envy and irritation. The keyword is *you* (roam, wander, play), which describes the movement of both Zhuangzi and Huizi, as well as that of the fish: the repetition here marks empathic continuity. Roaming is associated with the state of being free, at ease, and disinterested, whereby the mind can be most creative and best apprehend the world. To roam, wander, or play is also to overcome boundaries, to move from one state of being to another, to achieve the self-transformation in Daoist transcendence of the opposites of self and other, dreaming and waking, life and death.

Empathic identification with the fish, here an attitude of mind that allows transcendence of subjective consciousness, is literalized in a ninth-century classical tale. Censor Xue Wei of Qingcheng, in the eponymous story in *Sequel to the Record of Dark Mysteries* (*Xu xuanguai lu*) by Li Fuyan (ca. ninth cent),[2] falls sick for seven days and then lies in a deathlike coma for twenty days. He finally wakes up and asks to summon three friends who have just sat down to a meal of minced fish. He then tells them the circumstantial details about how the fish was caught and presented to them and concludes, "The carp that you killed was I." An account of the metamorphosis follows. "When I first got sick, I felt oppressed by the heat. It was quite unbearable. Suddenly, in stifling confusion, I forgot my sickness. I hated the heat and sought coolness, took my cane and left, not realizing it was a dream. Having left the city, my heart rejoiced, just like caged birds and barred animals regaining freedom." The departure of the spirit from the body is described as dream state and access to freedom.

Liberation culminates in Xue Wei's transformation into a carp. The mediatory steps are marked by aesthetic contemplation and memory of play. The autumnal streams and pools are "deep and pure," "unruffled by the slightest ripple, like a mirror embracing the distant void," and he remembers how he played in water as a child. As he swims in elation, he wonders (aloud) how humans may have greater mastery in water by borrowing the fish's form. A fish who overhears him brings an emissary bearing the Lord of the River's decree on Xue Wei's transformation. The decree recognizes Xue Wei's longing for freedom ("having thrown away his official's hairpin in the illusory world") and enjoins "temporary (therefore reversible?) scaly transformation" into "a red carp of the Eastern Pool." But it also reiterates distinctions between land and water existences, warns of dangers, and enumerates rules of conduct for fish. The agent of transformation thus brings intimations of anxieties and contradictions into the story.

Xue Wei's initial enjoyment of his metamorphosis rings with echoes of the *Zhuangzi*: "Immediately thereafter I was in fish garb. I thus let loose my body and roamed. Wherever my mind went I reached. Above the waves and at the bottom of the pools, there was nowhere I was not free and at ease (*congrong*)." The triumph of mind over matter is, however, short-lived; Xue Wei is soon consumed by creaturely hunger. He swallows the bait in a moment of confusion over self and role: "I am an official playfully donning fish garb. Even if I swallow his hook, how can Zhao Gan [the fisherman] kill me? Indeed, he will certainly return me to the *yamen* (government office)." From the moment he is caught, the tensions between presumed self and role become ever more agonizing. The more he insists on his previous identity, the more irrevocably he is imprisoned within his fish form. Xue Wei calls the fisherman, berates the buyer, appeals to his colleagues, cries out to his cook—but all they can register is the fish's mouth moving. Only with the final terror of death is his spirit liberated and able to return to his own body. As Xue Wei tells the story of his metamorphosis, his audience is filled with compassion (*airen*), "and thus the three friends all gave up minced fish, and to the end of their lives did not eat it again." Oddly enough, we are not told of Xue Wei's transformation: "From then on Wei recovered and was later eventually promoted to Assistant Magistrate of Huayang, then he died."

In "Censor Xue Attains Immortality in Fish Garb" by Lang Xian (fl. late sixteenth to early seventeenth century),[3] a much longer vernacular story adapted from "Xue Wei" and anthologized in *Constant Words to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi hengyan*), compiled by Feng Menglong (1573–1645), metamorphosis leads to enlightenment and immortality. Xue Wei is conveniently censor of Qingcheng, site of a sacred Daoist mountain. While this is merely mentioned in passing in the earlier tale, Mount Qingcheng and its famous temple dedicated to Laozi become an integral part of the plot in Lang Xian's story. Narrative attention is divided between Xue Wei's adventures as a carp and his wife's pieties and attempts to revive him (no wife is mentioned in "Xue Wei"), which unfold as a scheme of Daoist redemption. The two lines of the plot converge when Xue Wei-as-carp is killed and prepared as part of a sacrificial feast devoted to summoning Xue Wei's soul as he lies unconscious. With proper instruction from Daoist immortals, the revived Xue Wei regains karmic memory: he was the immortal Qin Gao, temporarily banished to the human world for love of a celestial musician who has been reborn as his wife. (According to *The Arrayed Biographies of Immortals* [*Liexian zhuan*] attributed to Liu Xiang [79–7 B.C.E.], Qin Gao was a master-musician who disappeared in a river and married a dragon princess. He later appeared to his disciples, emerging from a river and riding a red carp [*TPGJ* 4.24–25].) Both Xue and his wife ascend to heaven (with Xue astride a red carp) as immortals in a celebrated public spectacle at the end of the story.

Xue Wei's metamorphosis leads him to question his "original self." This is not accomplished as a consequence of self-forgetfulness and oblivion of his human existence in pure enjoyment of his fish-state, but through the persistence of human concerns in his fish-state. (The focus remains worldly, in a fashion typical of Ming-Qing vernacular fiction.) "The joy of fish" is correspondingly less emphasized. Initially "shocked and amazed" by his transformation, he soon decides to make the most of it. But Xue Wei's existence as a fish repeats the constraints and frustrations of earthly life: he is confined to the Eastern Pool by the Lord of the River's decree; he tries to jump the Dragon Gate and fails. Legend has it that the carp that jumps across the Dragon Gate becomes a dragon, which makes for playful parallels between the Dragon Gate competition and the civil service examination, a major preoccupation of the imperial literati since its institution in the Tang dynasty.[4] Alienation from his earthly self deepens after he is caught. He harps futilely on his power and position as censor. He has taught his cook a method of slicing and poaching carp, here described in loving detail as he lies helpless on the cutting board of his cook. Self-distancing allows him to understand the question of a Daoist immortal toward the end of the story: "You do not even apprehend your own body, and yet you would ask others? Perhaps you only recognize the censor of Qingcheng prefecture?"

This is a rather circuitous preamble, but I hope to use the *Zhuangzi* anecdote and the two Xue Wei stories (separately, as well as in relation to each other) to define some problems in the representation of immortality and enlightenment in the Chinese literary tradition. Zhuangzi's affirmation of the "joy of fish" traverses boundaries of self and other. But to be more than merely human is to be less so; to transcend the self is also to lose it. Hence the deep concern with mortality, which is to be overcome with an attitude of mind that forgets life and death or regards the two as equal. The quest for literal, physical immortality in religious Daoism (Daojiao, a

complex amalgam of the vocabulary of philosophical Daoism, alchemy, medical arts, folk and animist beliefs, and later, Buddhist practices; the term also designates successive religious movements that began in the late second century C.E.) is deeply incommensurate with philosophical Daoism: the *Zhuangzi* has only disdain for longevity and the undying. However, the literature of immortality mixes philosophical and religious Daoist discourses, sometimes using one to justify the other, sometimes to equivocate and express skepticism about the quest for literal immortality.

The "joy of fish" topos in *Zhuangzi* has also been linked to aesthetic contemplation and creation. Empathic identification with and intuitive communion with other forms of existence is elevated as the ideal of "affective embodiment of the world of things" (*tiwu*) in Chinese aesthetics. This idea is illustrated in an eighteenth-century Japanese version of the fish story, Ueda Akinari's (1734–1809) "Dream Carp" ("Muo no rigyo") in *Ugetsu Monogatari*, if I may allow myself to stray momentarily beyond the realm of Chinese literature.[5] Here, metamorphosis acquires specifically aesthetic dimensions. In this story, the monk-painter Kogi excels in painting fish. Aesthetic appreciation merges with Buddhist compassion in his purchase and release of fish caught by boatsmen in Lake Biwa, which is adjacent to his temple: to release captured creatures (*fangsheng*) is a wonted act of Buddhist piety, but here Kogi also paints the joy of fish as they regain their freedom. In sleep induced by the concentration of spirit concomitant with the act of painting, he dreams of entering the lake and roaming with all sorts of fish. Upon waking, he paints these dream images and calls them "dream carp."

The rest of the story follows the plot of "Xue Wei," with different religious and aesthetic twists. Here the god of the lake decrees Kogi's temporary transformation as reward for his piety in restoring freedom to caught fish.[6] Kogi's enjoyment of his carp state involves allusions to *Zhuangzi*, as well as extensive descriptions of the beauty of Lake Biwa, which echo Japanese and Chinese nature poetry. His metamorphosis is a function of his empathic identification with the "joy of fish," which is rooted in aesthetic illusion; it is therefore entirely appropriate that being a carp should allow heightened perception of beauty in nature. Echoing his earlier dreams interwoven with the act of painting, his carp state is described as "dream among reeds." The pain and horror of being caught and killed ends in Kogi "waking up from his dream." Toward the end of his life, his fish paintings are scattered into the lake. The painted fish "detached themselves from paper or silk to roam and play in water." Aesthetic mediation sidesteps paradoxes of immortality and enlightenment in the spirit of play and joyous illusion.

In both Xue Wei stories, the loss of human form is experienced both as liberation and with profound unease. In the Tang tale, anxiety is transmuted into awareness of the sentience of all things. The story purports to awaken compassion: it ends with the three friends' lifelong aversion to minced fish. This Buddhist perspective is articulated more clearly in "Zhang Zong," anthologized in the "karmic retribution: killing living things" section of *Taiping Guangji* (132.942–43). Zhang Zong is fond of minced fish; as punishment he is transformed into a fish, caught and eaten by a friend while his body lies in a deathlike coma. He revives, when the fish is killed, to tell the story. This logic of transgression and punishment is much less applicable in "Xue Wei." Xue Wei experiences elation, fear, self-alienation, but is ultimately not

transformed; instead the would-be consumers of the carp are awakened to compassion. What could have been developed is Xue Wei's Buddhist enlightenment as a result of compassion for the fish and apprehension of his own illusory form. Had the story been written that way, it would have developed the paradox of dispassionate compassion, or simultaneous pity and detachment in Buddhism. A Tang anecdote illustrates this paradox very well. Li Jifu (785–814) writes in "The Stele of the Chan Master Great Awakening of the Qingshan Temple in Hangzhou" ("Hangzhou Qingshan Si Dajue Chanshi bei"): "Someone once asked the Great Master: 'There were two emissaries at the station. The postmaster wanted to kill a sheep for them. When the two heard of it, one tried to save the sheep, the other did not. How would their good karma or evil karma differ?' The Great Master said, 'The one who tried to save the sheep is compassionate, the one who did not is liberated from all worldly attachment.' "[7]

The Buddhist perspective is suppressed in the vernacular story. Xue Wei's friends debate whether the carp should be released (*fangsheng*) to cultivate good karma for the still unconscious Xue. They decide against it because a Daoist sacrificial feast would presumably not follow Buddhist law. One friend argues, "To cultivate good karma does not depend on this. Just think, heaven gives rise to the myriad things, all for the sake of nourishing humans. . . . Hence the proverb, 'If Buddha is sitting on your heart, wine and meat will merely pass through your insides.' " This defense of the gratification of human desires (or, in any case, nonliteral abstinence) is typical of late-imperial vernacular fiction. Of the three accounts discussed, the late-Ming story represents the otherworld and immortality most graphically and palpably, yet it is also the most worldly and human centered and the least concerned about the experience of being a fish. Here the road to immortality involves self-alienation and denial of human form, but the loss of Xue Wei's body facilitates eternal possession of his body. Visions of the Daoist paradise are unabashedly worldly. Renunciation of human desires and appetites, necessary in the quest for immortality, is inextricably tied to the longing for ultimate fulfillment. The result is the paradox of worldly immortality, which brings together alienation from and ultimate preservation of the human body, detachment from worldly pleasures and assurance of their infinite extension.

Paradox of Immortality

In the *Zhuangzi*, mortality is overcome through metaphors of negativity: the Daoist sage has "no self" (*wuji*, ZZ 1.4), "no merit" (*wugong*, ZZ 1.4), "no name" (*wuming*, ZZ 1.4), "no passion" (*wuqing*, ZZ 5.46), "no word" (*buyan*, ZZ 2.18); he realizes "uselessness" (*wuyong*, ZZ 1.7), "nonaction" (*wuwei*, ZZ 1.7, 6.57), "nonbeing" (*wuyou*, ZZ 7.63), "forgetfulness" (*wang*, ZZ 6.59–60), "abstinence of mind" (*xinzhai*, ZZ 3.30).[8] In appearance he is often deformed, ugly, or forbiddingly quietistic (his form like "withered wood," his mind like "dead ashes" [ZZ 2.8]). These are guises of spiritual freedom and transcendence, attitudes of mind that encompass opposites of experience and accept death and loss. Zhuangzi urges "surrendering of bodily forms to go along with the great transformation" (*shunhua weixing*): "One happens upon the human form, yet one delights in it. As for the human form, there are ten

thousand transformations which do not begin to have a limit; the joy therein is then uncountable!" (ZZ 6.51). "For if one regards heaven and earth as the great caldron, and the Maker of Changes as the great swordsmith, wherever one goes how can one fail to assent!" (ZZ 6.55).

Such acceptance depends on the effacement of the desiring self. "Supreme joy is joyless" (ZZ 18.139) because it is privy only to those sublimely indifferent to joy and sorrow, "those who will not allow themselves to be injured within by inclinations and aversions" (ZZ 5.46). The *Zhuangzi* also describes higher beings at one with the Dao whose great powers seem to herald the more literal and magical immortals later in the tradition:

> In the distant Guyi Mountain dwells a divine being. His complexion is pure as ice and snow, and he has the meek gracefulness of a virgin. He does not feed on the five grains. Wind and dew constitute his sustenance. He rides on clouds, reins in flying dragons, and roams beyond the four seas. His spirit is concentrated. He makes things free of harm and diseases and lets the yearly grains ripen. (ZZ 1.4–5)

Jianwu hears this account from Jieyu and concludes by stating his disbelief. Lianshu derides Jianwu's incomprehension: "Such a person, such virtue, would embrace the myriad things and merge them into one. . . . Such a person is not harmed by things. A great flood reaches the sky—and he is not drowned; a great drought whereby metals and stones flow, and the earthern mountain is scorched—and he is not hot. Thus his dust, dirt, and husks would yet suffice to form and mould Yao and Shun (ancient sage kings). How can he agree to let mere things be his affairs?" (ZZ 1.5).[9]

Devices of dialogue, bracketing, and willful destabilization of levels of meaning in the *Zhuangzi* make it difficult to determine how literally one may interpret such accounts.[10] Descriptions of supernatural powers are often juxtaposed with acceptance of death and loss as "destiny" (*ming*, ZZ 6.50–52) or supreme oblivion of life and death, as in "Discourse on Making Things Equal": "He rides on clouds, astride sun and moon, and roams beyond the four seas. Death and life are for him no change, let alone the wherewithal of profit and harm!" (ZZ 2.20). Aerial journeys are not yet associated with the state of undying (*busi*) in the *Zhuangzi*. Pengzu's longevity (800 years in some accounts) is attributed to his apprehension of the Way (ZZ 6.52), but "lasting life" (*changsheng*) is upheld as an ideal only in the "outer chapters" and "miscellaneous chapters" (and even then not consistently), as when the 1200-year-old Guangchengzi advises the Yellow Emperor: "The extremes of the supreme Way are dark and silent. Be without sight and without hearing, embrace your spirit in quietude, and your form will rectify itself. You must be quiet and pure: do not belabor your form, do not shake your essence, then you can have lasting life. When your eyes see nothing, your ears hear nothing, your heart or mind knows nothing, then your spirit will guard your form, and your form will have lasting life" (ZZ 11.82). "Lasting life" is to be achieved through death unto sensory reality. Elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*, mere longevity (as exemplified by Pengzu), cultivated through breathing exercise (*daoyin*) and nourishing of the body (*yangxing*), is treated with disdain (ZZ 15.122).

Prayers for longevity (*shou*) appear already in Western Zhou (1122–771 B.C.E.) bronze vessels.[11] From about the eighth century B.C.E. on, supplication for "post-

ponement of old age" (*nanlao*) and "no death" (*wusi*) becomes common in bronze inscriptions.[12] While this may seem a mere intensification of the worldly desire for the extension of youth and life, the rise of the cult of immortality around the fourth to third century B.C.E. appears to be a separate and distinct development; its origins are still debated.[13] It is at this juncture that lightness, ascension, and aerial journeys come to be associated with immortality. As Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) and Yu Ying-shih point out, terms such as "transcendence of the world" (*dushi*) or "ascension to a distant place" (*dengxia*) indicate that "becoming an immortal" (*chengxian*) involves departure from the mundane world, even as the "true being" or "supreme being" in the *Zhuangzi* seems decidedly otherworldly. The worldly turn of otherworldly immortality in the third century B.C.E. involves the convergence of the immortality cult with older aspirations for longevity and the preservation of the body (*baoshen*).[14] In texts inspired by the various strands of Chinese thought that eventually converge as religious Daoism, we have depictions of literally undying beings who enjoy great powers, infinite extension of youth, and worldly happiness, and who inhabit realms of palpable material splendor. In *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopu zi*) by Ge Hong (283–363), we have the first systematic discussion of methods of attaining immortality. These include inner calm and indifference, rules of abstinence, and ingestion of "gold-cinnabar elixir" (*jindan*) produced by complex alchemical experiments. The inherent tensions between the Daoist vision of void and detachment and the overwhelming materiality of the immortal are articulated in the earliest poetic visions of immortality.[15] In what follows, I examine the poetics and rhetoric of becoming an immortal in two famous examples, "Distant Roaming" ("Yuanyu") (ca. third cent. B.C.E.?) and Sima Xiangru's (179–117 B.C.E.) "Poetic Exposition on the Great One" ("Daren fu").[16]

"Distant Roaming" belongs to the *Chuci* (literally, "words of Chu") tradition, a diverse corpus dominated by the quest for and encounter with deities, visions of other worlds, aerial journeys, transformations, and transcendence of mundane reality on the one hand, and lament over political disappointments, exile, persecution, misunderstanding, and mortality on the other.[17] These two dimensions are inextricably intertwined. Visions of other worlds may allegorize political aspirations. Fickle deities shade into undiscerning rulers; both inspire a rhetoric of despair and plaint. It seems safe to assume that the earliest stratum of the tradition, the "Nine Songs" ("Jiuge"), are "naively" and explicitly religious, and that their ritual formula of an all-too-brief or unsuccessful meeting with the divine being is later — beginning with "Encountering Sorrow" ("Lisao") — self-consciously invoked for allegorical purposes to express other kinds of longing and unfulfillment.[18]

The name of Qu Yuan (ca. 340?–278? B.C.E.), a Chu minister and aristocrat, is traditionally associated with many works in the *Chuci* tradition, most insistently "Encountering Sorrow." It is not clear whether Qu Yuan is created through, or the creator of, the *Chuci* corpus. Recurrent motifs unite his supposed biography and the poetry attributed to him: fervent and uncompromising political idealism, longing for escape, loyal counsel unheeded, experiences of being maligned and misunderstood, exile, despair, suicide. The problem of interpretation begins with journeys to other worlds inhabited by hosts of divine or semidivine beings and the poet's self-representation of his own powers and frustrations in these realms. It is almost im-

possible to draw the line between the magical-religious dimension and possible political-allegorical significance, especially since so little is actually known about the religions of Chu culture. Does "the quest in realms above and below" (CC 1.15) describe accession to shamanistic power? Does it allegorize exile, the search for recognition in another kingdom, or, more generally, the quest for a world in which the poet can preserve his integrity, exert his will, and fulfill his ideals?

The ambiguities are deepest in "Encountering Sorrow," which dwells on the poet's pleasure, power, and transformation during his journey (thus evoking religious, shamanistic echoes), as well as his failures due to the inconstancy of divine beings and the malice or ill will of intermediaries, his hesitations regarding his journeys, and his final longing for the human world. (That is, "the realms above and below" are mere repetitions of or inadequate substitutes for mundane reality, which implies the primacy of human, political concerns and invites allegorical interpretation.) This ambivalence persists to the very end:

> Have done!
> There is none in the realm who knows me,
> Why then long for the homeland?
> Since none can be partner in good government,
> I will follow Peng and Xian to their abodes.
>
> (CC 1.26)

Much depends on the identity of Pengxian or Peng and Xian.[19] According to the Han exegete Wang Yi, Pengxian was a Shang minister who drowned himself when the king did not heed his loyal counsel—Qu Yuan is thereby declaring his intention of martyrdom. (He is believed to have drowned himself in the Milo River.) However, no earlier sources support Wang Yi's gloss. If Peng is related to Pengzu, who is supposed to have lived 800 years, and Xian to Wu Xian, who earlier in the poem urges Qu Yuan to leave Chu and to undertake aerial journeys, then "Peng and Xian" would point to the quest for immortality and shamanistic power.

Works that come after "Encountering Sorrow" in the *Chuci* corpus are either more explicitly political, as in "Nine Works" (poems "declaring intent" that admit only brief allegorical forays into other realms) or are more decidedly concerned with the quest for immortality, as in "Distant Roaming." Both "Nine Works" and "Distant Roaming" are traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan. While "Nine Works" is certainly derived from one aspect of "Encountering Sorrow," "Distant Roaming" adds new elements, namely the language of philosophical Daoism and immortals in new guises.

"Distant Roaming" follows the logic of "Encountering Sorrow": calumny and slander of a sordid political reality, and the more general burden of the constraints of human existence, prompt the poet to undertake an "upward journey" (*shangzheng*):

> I grieve that the times are oppressive and perilous,
> And wish to rise lightly aloft and roam afar.
> My substance is meager, there is no wherewithal,
> To what vehicle can I entrust myself and ascend?
> . . . . . .

Heaven and earth are without limits,
I lament that human life is incessant toil.
For those past—I cannot reach them,
Of those to come—I cannot hear of them.

(*CC* 5.105)

In both poems, the enactment of other realms is self-conscious, almost self-reflexive: it is an extension of the poet's "declaration of intent." Summoned through an act of sheer will, the other world can be a precarious illusion—hence the poet's disappointments, doubts, and hesitations during his aerial journeys in "Encountering Sorrow." In "Distant Roaming," however, the expansion of vision and imagination is mediated through Daoist self-cultivation. It is no longer, as in "Encountering Sorrow," the direct, impassioned response to despair in the human world.

The spirit lasts but a moment and does not return,
The form withers, shrivels, and remains alone.
I turn inward to examine my beginning convictions,
And seek the origins of the Right Breath.
In the vastness of empty quietude, I find repose and joy,
Calmly, in nonaction, I am at one with myself.
I hear of Red Pine's pure dust,
And wish for his sway in the teachings left behind.

(*CC* 5.106)[20]

"Empty quietude" (*xujing*) and "nonaction" (*wuwei*) are key words in *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Here they are employed as philosophical justification of the pursuit of a more literal immortality under the tutelage of Red Pine, Master of Rain in the court of the legendary Shennong emperor. Continuity between the two is sought in the ethereality of the immortal. "They are gone with Transformation and cannot be seen," "Their forms are unmoving and disappear in the distance." The impurities of physical existence are to be refined through ingestion:

Reprise:
Spring and autumn flee, they do not tarry,
Why stay long in this abode of old?
The Yellow Emperor is out of reach,
I will follow Prince Qiao, make merry and play.
I dine on the Six Breaths, drink pure dew,
Rinse my mouth with the glow of southern mid-day sun,
  Holding therein radiance of clouds at sunrise.
I preserve the unblemished purity of the spirit's brightness.
Refined breath enters, the crude and soiled are removed.

(*CC* 5.107)

The Yellow Emperor is "out of reach" perhaps because of his solitary ascension: according to one account, as he rides a dragon and ascends to heaven, his ministers try to hold on to the dragon's "beard" and the emperor's bow, but to their considerable distress, the beard breaks off and the bow falls down.[21] By contrast Prince Qiao,

known in immortality lore as the player of *sheng*-pipes who can make phoenix cries and "roams along the banks of Yi and Luo Rivers,"[22] is one of the prototypical "playing immortals." The emphasis on ingestion is characteristic: most accounts imply that immortality depends on "transubstantiation," whose cause and token is "the avoidance of grains" (*bigu*) and the consumption of such substances as uncommon vegetation, pinecones, "stone marrow," turtle brains, cinnabar sand, and, not least, "gold-cinnabar pills." Taking its cue from the *Zhuangzi*, "Distant Roaming" combines the abstract and concrete aspects of "transubstantiation" with the idea of ingesting evanescent light, breath, and vapor.

The pattern of interweaving Daoist philosophical discourse with descriptions of physical transformation is repeated throughout the poem. The poet finds Prince Qiao, who instructs him by paraphrasing *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, while subtly qualifying the skepticism of *Zhuangzi*. He begins, "The Way can be received, / It cannot be passed on." In *Zhuangzi*, the Way "can be passed on, it cannot be received" (ZZ 6.51). The ineffability of the Way and communication beyond words inform both lines. But "the Way cannot be received" in *Zhuangzi* because one cannot be certain about the domains of knowledge. Such radical skepticism is inadmissible in "Distant Roaming." The Way can be possessed, for all its ineffability. Prince Qiao's instruction inspires the poet to another journey, during which the realm of the undying becomes more tangible and his own ethereality more real:

> I follow feathered beings at Danqiu,
> And stay at the old abode of the undying.[23]
> . . . . . .
> I breathe in subtle vapors of the flying cascades,
> And imbibe the splendid flowers of fine jade.
> Jade-colored radiance sets the face aglow,
> Essence purified is the beginning of strength.
> My substance is dissipated to meek graciousness,
> My spirit, deep and acute, is let loose in wanton abandon.
>
> (CC 5.108)

In this refined and fortified state, the poet undertakes an "upward journey," having borne his "material soul" (*po*), and "rises to a faraway place."[24] There follows a section of the poem most closely patterned on "Encountering Sorrow," but with deliberate reversals. In the earlier poem, the poet is barred from entry at the Gate of Heaven:

> I bade God's gatekeeper open the lock,
> He leaned against the gates and looked at me.
>
> (CC 1.16)

In "Distant Roaming," the churlish gatekeeper "pushes back" (*pai*) instead of "leans against" (*yi*) the gates, whereupon the poet continues his journey with a much more impressive entourage and paraphernalia: deities of the elements do his bidding; dragons, clouds, constellations become his instruments; he meets the high gods.[25] The refrain designating ecstatic union with the deities in the *Chuci*, "forget return" (*wangui*), is here linked to becoming an immortal ("transcendence of the world,"

dushi). At the height of power and pleasure, however, he is overcome with nostalgia for the human world:

> I wish to transcend the human world, forget return,
> Given full rein, my will soars high.
> Inwardly elated, I find myself fair,
> I will awhile seek pleasure with wanton abandon.
> I cross the blue clouds and roam in limitlessness,
> Suddenly from on high I catch sight of my homeland of old.
> My groom feels longing, my heart grieves,
> The outer horses look back, and refuse to go on.
>
> (CC 5.111)

"Encountering Sorrow" ends with one such moment of looking back and hesitation, followed by the final avowal of abiding by Pengxian's example cited earlier.

> I had ascended the splendors of heaven—
> Suddenly from on high I caught sight of my homeland of old.
> My groom grieved, and my horses, filled with longing,
> Arched their heads, looked back, and refused to go on.
>
> (CC 1.26)

In "Distant Roaming," however, the poet overcomes his nostalgia and continues his journey.

> I long for the ones I have known and imagine their forms.
> I heave a long sigh and wipe away tears.
> Adrift and at ease, I rise afar,
> Restrain my will and calm myself.
>
> (CC 5.111)

He goes south and is entertained by the music and dancing of goddesses who elude the poet in "Encountering Sorrow." "Ever-expansive music that is without limits—/ I am to leave but tarry awhile." Just as sensual pleasures become more palpable, the poet heads to the northern limits, looks back, seeks Qianlei (the god of transformations, according to some sources) as guide, and in the end confronts an austere vision of the void.

> I course the Four Directions,
> And roam the Six Limits.
> Above I reach the Lightning Crack,
> Descending, I view the Great Chasm.
> No earth in the receding depths below,
> No sky in the limitless expanse above.
> Visions last but an instant, I see nothing.
> Listening yields vague echoes, I hear nothing.
> Transcending Nonaction I reach Supreme Purity,
> And become neighbor to Ultimate Beginning.
>
> (CC 5.112–13)

To "look back" (*fangu*) in "Encountering Sorrow" is to be overcome by the sense of liminality, of being between worlds: it marks a moment of expectation, confusion, nostalgia. In "Distant Roaming," the poet "looks back" to summon a guide, who leads him to the ultimate vision. The powers and pleasures of the immortal in "Distant Roaming" supposedly rectify the doubts and hesitations of the poet in "Encountering Sorrow." His new confidence is derived from the discourse of philosophical Daoism and more palpable visions of immortality. Negative transcendence (motifs of void, detachment, nonaction) is imagined as dissipating physical form and heightening the spiritual power of the aspiring immortal. Ultimately, however, the final Daoist vision of emptiness represents an ironic disjunction with the preceding description of the increasingly tangible gratification of desires in the quest for literal immortality.

In "Distant Roaming," both the Daoist vision of the void and the more literal powers and permanence of the immortal express the poet's longing for escape and vindication in another realm. The Daoist philosophical discourse that provides the impetus as well as the ambiguous conclusion to the poet's heavenward journey represents the philosophical resolution of the poet's doubts in imagining magical transcendence. In this sense, the journey and its ambivalent philosophical justification define the vagaries of lyrical consciousness. When rhetorical communication takes precedence over lyrical expression in early Han *fu* (poetic exposition), the dominant genre of the succeeding era, ambiguities of the heavenly journey shift to the mode and purpose of persuasion.

In "Poetic Exposition on the Great One," the great Han court poet Sima Xiangru describes a heavenly journey that shows close parallels with "Distant Roaming." "The Great One" who enjoys the powers and pleasures of immortality is also the implied audience, Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 B.C.E.). The historical Emperor Wu was interested in the quest for immortality—his consequent follies and megalomaniac delusions are described in "The Treatise on Feng and Shan Sacrifices" in Sima Qian's (145–ca. 90 B.C.E.) *Records of the Historian*. Since "The Great One" is presented to the emperor, the most persistent question that emerges is the purpose of the rhetorical communication—whether remonstrance or flattery and enticement is intended.

The eulogistic aspect of the poetic exposition is evident from the beginning. Unlike the poet in "Distant Roaming," the Great One is not motivated by frustrations and anguish, although there is obligatory mention of the world being too narrow and confining for him. The ensuing visions are thus not charged with the same subjective illumination as in the earlier poem: this is a more externalized universe, even as the Great One's carriages, banners, retinue, and steeds of flying dragons become his attributes. His heavenly journey is presented as the logical, even necessary, manifestation of his being—hence the absence of teachers and mediators. Absolute greatness no longer admits of self-transformation: the Great One cannot "become an immortal" (*chengxian*); the apotheosis of person implies that immortality is integral to his being. Also, unlike the *Chuci* poet lamenting his exile, the Great One is at the center, not the periphery.

The world has the Great One,
In the Land of the Center.
His abode fills ten thousand *li*,

Yet does not suffice to detain him even a while.
He grieves that worldly ways are oppressive and narrow,
And so leaves, rises aloft lightly, and roams afar.
Riding the white dragon-rainbow with red banners,
He carries clouds of vapors and floats upwards.

(*SJ* 117.3056)

The Great One has from the beginning an impressive entourage, as befits his imperial station. He ascends as master, not seeker, in the heavenward journey. He consorts as equal with the immortals ("True Beings," *zhenren*): they "seek each other." There can thus be no concealment or mystery, let alone rejection, in the heavenly realm. "In great brightness, fog is banished, / Quickly fading, clouds dissolve" (*SJ* 117.3057). Compared to "Encountering Sorrow" and "Distant Roaming," the journey here is much more symmetrical, reminiscent of the imperial tour of the four corners of empire. In the course of the journey (as the Great One turns southward), the poetic exposition shifts to first person (*yu, wu*), perhaps following the *Chuci* convention, perhaps to register the immediacy of revelatory significance disclosed. Toward the end of his journey (in south and west), the apotheosis of his powers is juxtaposed with an ambivalent vision of immortality:

The times seem turbid and dark, a chaotic confusion,
I summon Pingyi[26] to execute the Wind Lord and punish the Rain Master.
I look west to Kunlun Mountain, a vast, vague expanse,
And gallop straight there across Sanwei Mountain.
I push back the heavenly gates and enter the palace of god,
Carry the Jade Maiden and return with her.
. . . . . .
Lowly encircling Shadow Mountain in circuitous flight,
I now see with my own eyes the Queen Mother of the West.[27]
Her hoary white head wearing ornaments, she lives in caves,
Fortunate indeed to have as her messenger the three-footed crow.[28]
To live for eternity in this state and not die,
Even were it to last ten thousand ages, is no cause for joy.

(*SJ* 117.3060)

In the *Chuci* the shaman-poet often commands the elements, but here turbid darkness prompts the Great One to go one step further and punish the offending deities. The Kunlun appears in numerous ancient sources as the abode of immortals in the far northwest. With a pillar reaching to heaven, it is the "lower capital" (*xiadu*) of the heavenly emperor. Here accession to Kunlun Mountain is speedy and unhampered. The gatekeeper of heaven in "Encountering Sorrow" and "Distant Roaming" is dispensed with; the Great One himself pushes back the gate. The fickle goddesses who elude the questing poet in the *Chuci* tradition here become the compliant Jade Maiden. At the height of his power, the Great One beholds the joyless immortality of the Queen Mother of the West, who also lives in Kunlun Mountain. Some later readers who construe "The Great One" as an ironic deflation of Emperor Wu's quest for immortality adduce this pathetic image as evidence. How-

ever, in "The Biography of Sima Xiangru" in the *Records of the Historian*, in which "The Great One" first appears, the poet states his laudatory intention. Sima Xiangru also claims that images of ascetic, emaciated immortals living in mountains and marshes are unworthy of emperors (*SJ* 117.3056). The Queen Mother of the West may be represented as one such counterpoint in the celebration of the epiphany of imperial immortality, for which otherworldly transcendence is no longer necessary because absolute power brooks no discontinuities between worlds and makes choice unnecessary.

This equivocation persists in the final image of the void. After turning away from the Queen Mother of the West, the Great One proceeds to a feast at the Dark City, where he ingests the customary vapors, clouds, and precious gems. Discontent with the undying goddess's dreary immortality, the Great One is spurred to greater heights and more distant journeys. He descends, moving slowly because he is deterred by the confines of the mundane world. As with the poet in "Distant Roaming," he finally stops at the Gates of the Cold and confronts emptiness. The last six lines of "The Great One" show obvious ties with the ending of "Distant Roaming."

> No earth in the receding depths below,
> No sky in the limitless expanse above.
> Vision is blurred and dazzled, I see nothing.
> Listening yields vague echoes, I hear nothing.
> Riding on the Great Void to rise in flight,
> Transcendent, without companion, I stand alone.
>
> (*SJ* 117.3062)

Remonstrance may be intended but certainly is not accomplished. Upon reading the poetic exposition, the emperor "was greatly delighted, as if floating away on clouds and roaming between heaven and earth" (*SJ* 117.3063). The language of philsophical Daoism may purport to bracket visions of infinite and eternal power and to undermine the preceding celebration of the Great One's glory, thus serving the ultimate rhetorical purpose of remonstrance. But the equivocation is such that the final void may be conceived as the one necessary step beyond ultimate power and glory, a crowning complement of totality rather than its ironic negation.

Composed during a crucial formative period of the immortality cult, "Distant Roaming" and "The Great One" point to some of its major concerns and contradictions. In "Distant Roaming," the vocabulary of philosophical Daoism justifies and at the same time relativizes the physical transformations involved in the attainment of immortality. Whereas "Distant Roaming" presents immortality as dissipating form and as something to be sought in an otherworldly realm, "The Great One" purports to depict a more grandiose and worldly immortality. Here worldly power and glory are enhanced, not diminished; physical presence is more palpable, not less so; transitions between the mundane world and the otherworld are effortless; linear quest becomes imperial circuit and Olympian survey (*lan*). The fear that immortality may be less than human is embodied in the image of the Queen Mother of the West. To counter this fear, the poet proposes immortality that is the fulfillment or extension of worldly glory and power. Consequently the Great One undergoes no transformations; he simply manifests his being—for Emperor Wu he also represents

the goal of transformation, which will guarantee changelessness and permanence. Ironically, absolute mastery also makes him preside over the void alone. This ultimate changelessness may indeed inspire alienation from the Great One as ideal but apparently failed to do so with the intended reader.

The fear of absolute transcendence and the suspicion that to overcome mortality may mean the loss of humanity remain dominant concerns in the discourse on immortality. In *The Biographies of Divine Immortals* attributed to Ge Hong, Pengzu tells of immortals who can scale heavenly heights and transform themselves at will:

> Strange bones grow on their faces, uncommon hair covers their bodies. Mostly enamored of hidden depths, they do not consort with the common run of humanity. But such beings, although they have undying longevity, banish human feelings and are far from glories and joys. They are like birds transformed into toads, or pheasants into clams: they have lost their original truth and instead guard their strange breath. My foolish heart does not wish for this.[29]

The idea of gradations of immortality is in part a response to this reservation. In *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity*, Ge Hong quotes *The Classic of Immortals* (*Xianjing*):

> The higher beings raise their forms and ascend to the void and are called "heavenly immortals" (*tianxian*); the middle beings roam in famous mountains and are called "earthly immortals" (*tixian*); the lower beings first die and are then transformed; they are called "immortals liberated from the corpse" (*shijie xian*).[30]

Many accounts of immortals describe postponement or even refusal of ascension to heaven. One Master White Stone (so called because he cooks white stones as food) attains the Way of Undying through a sexual regime and "the elixir of liquid gold." Having lived more than 2,000 years, he looks about forty. Pengzu asks him why he does not take the elixir for ascending to heaven.

> He replied, "Can heavenly joys be compared to those of the human world? All one needs is to be no longer subject to old age and death! There are in heaven numerous supreme beings one has to serve—that would make it more dreary than the human world." That was why people called Master White Stone the Eremitic Immortal, for in not being intent on ascending to heaven to become an immortal official, he is like one not seeking recognition and renown.[31]

Master White Stone's assertion that the celestial hierarchy is more oppressive than the human one shows how the ideal of earthly immortality depends on the conception of heaven as continuation or as repetition of the mundane world. The dialectics of sameness and difference govern the literature of immortality. To attain immortality, one goes against life and nature—stills desires, refines away one's physical existence, controls breathing, ingests strange substances—but the goal is ultimate gratification, infinite extension of life and its pleasures. In other words, one has to be different to stay the same. Hence the fear of too much difference, that point of no return when one can no longer retrieve one's humanity. The Daoist paradise, with its palpable material splendor and elaborate hierarchy, makes it either an ideal or a dispensable goal. But it is pursued or eschewed for the same reason: its sameness in difference when compared to the mundane world.

Aesthetic Mediation

The poet enacts the illusion of power and glory in "The Great One" for the emperor's enjoyment or edification. Self-conscious illusion is later taken up and "lyricized" in the analogies between the heavenly journey and actual or imaginary excursions in exotic landscapes. In Sun Chuo's (314–371) "Poetic Exposition on Roaming in the Tiantai Mountains" ("You Tiantai shan fu"),[32] the rhetoric of Daoist enlightenment, quest for immortality, and elaborate descriptions of landscape are framed by references to aesthetic contemplation and creation.

In the preface, Sun Chuo reiterates the widely held belief that immortals and divine beings live in famous mountains. Yet Tiantai is not among the most famous "five mountains"; its hiddenness and difficulty of access account for its unjust oblivion. Representations of Tiantai correspondingly take on revelatory significance.

> Yet how can the rise of pictorial representations [of Tiantai Mountains] have no significance! Unless one leaves the world and ponders the Way, banishes grains and ingests asphodel, how can one rise lightly aloft and take abode there? Unless one lodges one's spirit afar and inquires into dark mysteries, and through steadfast conviction reaches the gods, how can one preserve that place in distant imagining? That is why I let my spirit gallop and my thoughts speed, intoning poems in the daytime and staying awake at night. In the instant between bowing and raising my head, it is as if I ascend twice over. I am about to untie my official's cap and forever entrust myself to these mountains. Unable to bear such compelling extremes of chanting and imagining, I can only flourish fine phrases to relieve my concerns.

The two rhetorical questions here set up implicit parallels between taking abode in Tiantai and imagining being there from afar. Actual disengagement and abstemious self-cultivation in the quest for immortality are on a par with acts of consciousness imagining Tiantai, inquiring into its mysteries, believing in its spiritual power. Initially inspired by the pictorial representations of the Tiantai Mountains and his own poetic response, the poet's imagined journey reenacts the aesthetic illusion and seeks therein intimations of enlightenment and immortality.

Unlike "Distant Roaming" and "The Great One," "Roaming in the Tiantai Mountains" is concerned with actual landscape as setting for the spirit journey. Extraordinary landmarks are omens (*zhao*) whose meanings the poet pursues:

> Seeing these tokens of spirits, I fare forward.
> Drifting, in a trice, I am about to go there.
> I follow feathered beings at Cinnabar Hills,
> And seek the Hallowed Yards of the undying.

Perilous landscape and difficulty of ascent confirm the significance of the journey:

> Although for once I risk being "under the eaves,"[33]
> I will forever gain lasting life.
> Sincerity must match Mysteries Hidden,
> Then steps on repeated perils become ever more even.

Midway through the poetic exposition, ascent seems to have been accomplished. Elevated perception ("I let heart and mind roam") and ritual purification ("I cross

Spirit Creek and wash myself there") produce visions of the "city of the Undying" (*xiandu*), which mix topoi of Daoist and Buddhist enlightenment.

> Prince Qiao, astride his crane, soars heavenward,
> Buddhist arhats, with flying staff, pace the Void.
> Coursing extravagantly in the swiftness of spirit transformations,
> All at once they leave Presence and enter Absence.

When the "roaming gaze" (*youlan*) comes to rest, there is tranquillity of body and spirit. Ingestion of magical sustenance ("oils of purple-black jade" and "fountains of Flower Pool") is juxtaposed with apprehension of Daoist and Buddhist doctrines ("discourses on Beyond-Image," "texts on Non-Birth") in the attainment of enlightenment. There is no contradiction: both are now rooted in self-consciously manipulated aesthetic illusion, whose self-transcendence concludes the poetic exposition.

> To indulge in the joy of words for the whole day
> Equals the lonesome stillness of not having spoken.
> Converging myriad phenomena for dark contemplation,
> Oblivious, I become one body with the Naturally Thus.

As we have seen with "Dream Carp," aesthetic transcendence is self-consiously playful and ironic. The claim that self-transformation may be achieved through aesthetic contemplation, writing, and reading is always burdened with the awareness that the aesthetic experience is based on engagement with illusions.

Paradox of Enlightenment

Early accounts of immortals, such as *The Arrayed Biographies of Immortals* or *The Biographies of Divine Immortals*, are often no more than litanies of divine or semi-divine beings and their miraculous deeds. They are either born with, or acquire through instruction and self-cultivation, extraordinary attributes and powers, although in the first systematic discussion of alchemy and attainment of immortality, Ge Hong takes care to emphasize that the immortals of legend and lore should not be "divinized," as this would cast doubt on the teachable art of becoming an immortal. Biographies of immortals often describe their physical transformation (e.g., regained youth, acquisition of wings, voluntary metamorphosis into other creatures) or tangible powers, which usually involve ingestion of certain substances, dietary and breathing exercises, and internalization of esoteric texts. Abstinence and mental attitudes of detachment or compassion are also emphasized.

One may surmise that Buddhist influence accounts for the representation of a moment of decisive transformation in the process of becoming an immortal, when the experience of self-alienation, forgetfulness, or sublime indifference brings about enlightenment. The consequent paradoxes develop from the ambiguous role of desire and attachment in both Daoist and Buddhist discourses. Being "without feelings" (*wuqing*) is necessary for the apprehension of emptiness, yet the Daoist immortal may satisfy his worldly appetites in the Daoist paradise. Buddhist transcendence is unequivocally otherworldly, yet the enlightened one, divested of attachment, feels compassion in the salvational scheme. I have earlier characterized this as the problems of worldly immortality and compassionate dispassion, respectively.

The ninth-century Xue Wei tale brings up the Buddhist idea of compassion but stops short of a full-fledged Buddhist conclusion, which would have involved Xue Wei's conversion as a consequence of alienation from his body and empathic identification with the fish. In the seventeenth-century Xue Wei story, the topos of metamorphosis and self-alienation as the prelude to Daoist enlightenment is embedded in the plot but not fully developed. In neither story is detachment from human emotions, or questioning of the human state from the perspective of the fish, pushed to a logical conclusion. (The instrumental role of metamorphosis in self-understanding and religious experience is a recurrent topos in the tradition: alienation from the body leads to sustained meditation on the relationship between self and role, illusion and reality.)[34]

"Du Zichun"[35] (*TPGJ* 16.109–12), another story from the ninth-century *Sequel to the Record of Dark Mysteries* that includes "Xue Wei," is perhaps a more powerful illustration of the pathos and paradox of ultimate detachment. Du Zichun is a wastrel figure who has wasted away his patrimony. In his impoverished state he meets an old man who gives him vast sums of money. "His prodigal heart was again ignited," and he soon loses everything. The old man then bestows even vaster sums on Du Zichun, who again promptly reverts to old ways despite initial resolutions. For a third time the old man multiplies his gift, whereupon Du Zichun uses the money to provide for the needy in his clan, settles old scores and obligations, and then puts himself at the old man's disposal.

Presumably schooled by the ephemerality of gains and losses to a new understanding of detachment, Du Zichun becomes the old man's partner in the pursuit of immortality. He finds the old man in hallowed Daoist precincts in Mount Hua. In the middle of the main hall is a huge caldron burning over purple flames. The old man, now in Daoist garb, tells Du to remain silent and unmoved through illusions of violence, pain, and suffering. Du Zichun is then assailed by visions of an army's onslaught, hordes of fierce and poisonous creatures, anomalous natural phenomena, demons threatening dismemberment, gruesome torture of his wife. He is then beheaded, and he silently bears with the torments of hell. Reborn as a woman, he/she marries and gives birth to a son. Her husband berates her for her scornful silence and dashes their two-year-old child to the ground and kills him. "Love and attachment (*ai*) rose in Zichun's heart. He suddenly forgot his vow and inadvertently cried out, 'Ah!' Before that sound came to an end, he was sitting in the same spot as before." The caldron where the Daoist has been brewing immortality elixir is swallowed in purple flames. The Daoist puts out the fire and explains:

> In your heart, you have forgotten joy, anger, sadness, fear, aversion, desires. What you have not yet reached is oblivion to attachment. Had you formerly not made that "ah" sound, my elixir would have been created and you too would become an immortal on high. Alas, the talent to become an immortal is hard to come by! I can refine my elixir again, but your body must yet be contained by the world. Mark my words!

Variations of this story also appear in *Hedong ji* (*TPGJ* 44.276–78, "Xiao Dongxuan") and in Duan Chengshi's (803?–863) *Yuyang zazu* (*xuji* 4.100).[36] The Daoist Xiao Dongxuan in the eponymous tale chooses Zhong Wuwei ("To the End Non-

Action") as partner in the quest for immortality after witnessing the latter's physical courage and lofty indifference to bodily pain. Zhong Wuwei endures in silence temptations (including invitations from immortals and Daoists to attain enlightenment and immortality) and visions of terror. But with death and reincarnation, "his heart became confused" and forgetfulness overtakes him. The logic of the trials thus stipulates that even without a higher imperative in sight, Zhong Wuwei has to forego all attachment to attain immortality. Thus the stone where his wife dashes their baby to death and where he utters an inadvertent cry is transformed into the caldron where the elixir of immortality is being brewed, once the illusion is dispelled. In Duan's much briefer story, we have very much the same plot. Here reincarnation does not becloud the seeker's memory of the vow of silence, but the monstrous sight of his children (numbering three) murdered one after the other leads to the involuntary cry.

Duan Chengshi refers to an earlier version of this story in the great monk-scholar-traveler Xuan Zang's (600–664) *Accounts of the Western Lands during the Great Tang* (*Da Tang xiyu ji*),[37] which points to the probable Indian origins of these stories. He relates legends surrounding a pool named "Martyred Hero" (*Lieshi*) and "Saving Lives" (*Jiuming*). A hermit who has acquired the art of transformation obtains a magical formula for attaining immortality. With the help of a man who can keep quiet and still from evening till dawn, he is to "chant magical charms, retract vision and reverse hearing,[38] and by the morning attain immortality. The sharp knife he is holding will turn into a precious sword. He will traverse the void, step on emptiness, and rule over immortals. As he holds his sword and issues commands, all his wishes will be fulfilled. Without decline or aging, he will not fall sick or die." There is no mention here of the silent one himself becoming an immortal. The hermit then earns the gratitude of a man who wants to "repay a true friend" by helping him in the quest for immortality. He finally utters the fateful cry when, as a sixty-five-year-old man, he protests his wife's attempt to kill their young son. At the moment of failure, flames descend from the sky, and the hermit escapes with the man to a pool (thereafter named "Saving Lives"). The man who fails his benefactor dies from shame and grief (hence the name "Martyred Hero"). Xuan Zang's account thus commemorates the pathos and heroism of the failure to attain immortality.

These stories share two common topoi: a sense of obligation and loyalty toward the Daoist (in Xuan Zang's version, we have a hermit); and the love for one's child, the attachment that cannot be overcome, that bars the protagonist from the attainment of immortality. The first point logically leads to the second one. In this sense, the quest for immortality is doomed to failure. The protagonist enters into a pact with the Daoist to fulfill a personal bond, but the realization of the pact dictates erasure of all forms of attachment. The impetus for the quest of immortality is also that which frustrates it. The logic of the passage from attachment to detachment remains a constant problem in the representation of enlightenment.

We are also confronted with the problem of inhuman immortality, enlightenment that implies denial of being human. The reader empathizes with Du Zichun's failure. Had he not cried out, had he successfully divested himself of all forms of attachment, he would also have removed himself from the reader's sympathy. ("Du Zichun" is the only story in this group that has the protagonist reborn as a woman as

he battles illusions and attachments. The sex change apparently functions to confound karmic memory and to emphasize the emotional ties with the baby.) The vernacular version of this story, "Du Zichun Thrice Entered Changan"[39] ("Du Zichun sanru Changan," ca. sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, anthologized in *Constant Words to Awaken the World*, which also includes "Censor Xue Attained Immortality in Fish Garb"), understands the necessity of Du's failure and also turns it into the occasion for his "second chance." In this story, the old man manages to give him remnants of the immortality elixir; Du returns home to "cultivate the Way," combining compassion for those in need with ascetic indifference to worldly gains and ties. His wife, Wei Shi (no wife is mentioned in the Tang tale), becomes his partner in search of enlightenment. Du Zichun leaves home after three years and finds the old man, who turns out to be the Daoist deity Laozi.[40] Laozi's divine status transforms the precarious, tantalizing quest for immortality in the earlier story into carefully monitored trials to gauge Du Zichun's readiness for becoming an immortal. Laozi gives Du Zichun three immortality pills, one to be reserved for his wife. He reminds Du: even as Liu An ascends to heaven with his entire household, including the chicken and dogs in his courtyard,[41] there is no reason for Du's wife not to follow him in immortality. The story concludes with Du Zichun dedicating a temple to Laozi and the dramatic heavenward ascension of Du and his wife on either side of Laozi, a public spectacle celebrated with due relish. The vernacular story thereby completely reverses the logic of the Tang tale. Inexpungeable attachment costs Du Zichun immortality in the earlier story. Here attachment is redeemable, vindicated, perhaps even rewarded, in a more worldly and humanized immortality.

Yet the tensions and pathos of the ninth-century tale, aesthetically the more satisfying work, are lost in the vernacular story. The ineradicable opposition of attachment and detachment, as well as the rupture in the experience of conversion, are too easily resolved through the idea of worldly immortality. There is an abiding fascination in the literary tradition with the alternative vision: the representation of enlightenment as negation of sensuous reality. Many major works of fiction are punctuated by or end with visions of Buddhist or Daoist emptiness (the two are often mixed together), sometimes presented as accounts of renunciation and enlightenment. A brief glance at the early masterpieces of full-length vernacular fiction suffices to prove the point.

Three Kingdoms (first extant edition, 1522, with preface dated 1494), which chronicles the rise and fall of the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu in the third century, brackets its moral and historical concerns—power politics, military strategems, and legitimate mandate—with visions of fatuous striving, relentless repetition, and ultimate emptiness, which together define a perspective beyond history. Daoist magicians taunt mighty rulers; recluses point to eremitic escape from all worldly conflicts; the ghost of Guan Yu, one of the book's great heroes, seeks vengeance for his death but finds enlightenment instead when he listens to a monk expounding the insubstantiality of the self and the illusory nature of justice and grievance, gain and loss. Similarly, *Water Margin* (earliest extant editions, ca. sixteenth cent.), devoted for the most part to bandit-heroes establishing a counter-government or counter-culture based on gang morality and defiance of the existent sociopolitical order, still frames perspectives on heroism with visions of the void and renunciation,

whereby two notable erstwhile bandit-heroes become Buddhist monks. *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*, earliest extant edition, 1617 preface), a 100-chapter novel about the rise and fall of Ximen Qing and his household, focuses its steady gaze on a suffocating and all-too-human world dominated by insatiable greed for power, money, and sexual gratification. The author has boundless curiosity about family and social relations and, more generally, about the texture of daily existence, but he veers from the mundane realm at the very end. The disintegration of Ximen Qing's household coincides with the collapse of the Northern Song dynasty brought about by the invading Jin army. The sense of an ending here is provisionally crowned with a vision of Buddhist redemption: Ximen Qing's son and reincarnation (Ximen Qing had died from sexual excesses in ch. 79) becomes the disciple of a Buddhist monk. In such cases, it is not necessarily the case that the Buddhist solution represents "the last word." What we find are philosophical and religious perspectives that question human strivings, illusions of power, and sensuous reality, as well as an emergent meta-fictional consciousness. Sudden distancing from the dense web of sensuous details, desires and aversions, virtues and vices, that the reader has experienced intensely has the effect of focusing attention on the status of fictional illusion. Where conviction may be lacking in the enactment of philosophical or religious transcendence, there seems to be perceived structural necessity. The totality of aesthetic illusion includes its questioning or negation.

In these examples, however, a character's conversion (or that of his ghost or reincarnation) often functions merely as closure or fulfillment of overall structural design. Inasmuch as the wonted category of "sudden enlightenment" (*dunwu*) in Buddhist and Daoist thought implies radical shifts of consciousness, its literary representation also involves discontinuities and raises questions on the logic of character development. In some cases, the topos of sudden enlightenment is but tongue-in-cheek apology for extensive treatment of forbidden subjects. Thus accounts of Buddhist or Daoist enlightenment and repudiation of sexuality at the end of a story are recurrent ploys in late-imperial erotic literature (e.g., *The Carnal Prayer Mat* [*Rou putuan*, ca. seventeenth century]).

The first serious exploration of how passion can transcend itself or how desire may generate the mechanism for its own arrest is found in the eighteenth-century masterpiece *The Story of the Stone* (*Shitou ji*) or *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*) by Cao Zhan (sobriquet Xueqin, 1715?–1763 or 1764). In this novel, the protagonist Jia Baoyu moves from limitless longing to Buddhist renunciation. The inner logic of this transformation is supposedly captured by the formula "enlightenment through love" or "detachment through attachment" (*yiqing wudao*), which is the goddess Disenchantment's professed aim when she guides Baoyu through the Illusory Realm of the Great Void (ch. 5). In this dream, Disenchantment introduces Baoyu to the totality and acme of sensual pleasures, culminating in his sexual union with her sister, Jianmei ("All Beauties-in-One"), and also warns of their dangers and ultimate negation, a message encoded in riddles about the decline and fall of Baoyu's family and the sad fate of all the women loved by Baoyu. Upon waking, Baoyu has his first sexual experience with a maid (ch. 6). The elusive lesson on the mutual implication of totality and negativity, desire and loss or death, is not grasped by Baoyu until his second visit to the Illusory Realm in chapter 116.

In chapter 1, after a second perusal of the book, Voiding-the-Void Daoist (supposedly its first reader) concludes that "its main theme is about love." "Love" is perhaps an inadequate rendering of *qing*, whose range of associations includes desire, affection, feelings, emotions, sentiments, sentience. It is also linked to subjective consciousness, imagination, aesthetic sensibility. Cao Xueqin idealizes *qing* and raises its transcendent dimension to an almost metaphysical level; in doing so he also emphasizes lyrical self-containment, the power of the mind to dream and imagine a world, and the conception of the romantic-aesthetic as an alternate sphere of existence. Yet the mood of the book is elegiac, and from the beginning, love is shown to have inevitable ties with sadness, loss, and death. To know love is to apprehend its implacable negation. In terms of the involutions of Baoyu's consciousness, there are indeed moments when he approaches self-questioning and self-distancing because of the frustrations of love and attachment (chs. 21, 22, 36), but these moments usually represent spontaneous responses to accidental provocations; as such, they are merely further instances of his giving full rein to his inclinations and desires. Baoyu's stubborn mythmaking when his world crumbles—he turns his dead maid, Qingwen, into a flower spirit in an elegy (ch. 78)—shows how, even to the bitter end, he affirms the power of consciousness, feelings, and words to create a reality he can live by. Intimations of Buddhist understanding punctuate the narrative, notably through mirror metaphors.[42] But there is no real cumulative process whereby he gradually reaches transcendence of attachment. In this, Baoyu is true to the lyrical ideal, for lyrical intensity is a suspension of the moment and has little to do with duration and history. To the extent that sudden enlightenment is also of the moment and bypasses historical continuity in the heightening of awareness, it too is a manifestation of lyrical consciousness. On another level, "enlightenment through love" means that passion and its transcendence involve the same attitudes of mind, namely, spontaneity, intensity, self-forgetfulness. But this is an equivocal logic; attachment and detachment now seem suspiciously alike.

As Baoyu turns against his former self and becomes cold and indifferent in the final chapters (chs. 116–120), it becomes much more difficult to empathize with him. The fulfillment of the paradox of "enlightenment through love" is symbolically and structurally, but perhaps not psychologically, inevitable. By the same token, basic contradictions remain unresolved, although the same paradoxical logic of self-transformation is supposed to inform processes of aesthetic creation (the author claims to have awakened) and literary communication (in ch. 1., Voiding-the-Void Daoist copies and transmits the story; in the process he undergoes a cycle of conversion—starting from emptiness, he apprehends form and feelings and reaches enlightenment—and renames himself Monk of Feelings). The reader is more likely to have been caught up in illusion and emotions than to have transcended them. Cao Xueqin's book is supposed to redeem "the guilt of half a lifetime wasted and not a single skill acquired" (preface), yet this is to be accomplished through memory and fictional creation of "all those remarkable girls in the inner chambers." Indeed, the radical discontinuity implied in the idea of sudden enlightenment allows the author to linger interminably on this most beautiful of dreams. The paradox of "enlightenment through love" thus conveys Cao Xueqin's mixture of nostalgia and irony toward his own past, the world he creates, and the ideal of lyrical self-containment in

the tradition. This is the moment when the poetics of conversion occasions sustained reflection on fictionality and aesthetic creation, and on the paradoxical opposition and mutual implication of desire and renunciation, illusion and reality.

Conclusion

We see here recurrent patterns of anxiety, ambivalence, and equivocation. Immortality and enlightenment are paradoxical propositions in Chinese literature because self-transformation promises transcendence of the human condition and yet raises fears for the loss of humanity. Intuitive communion and empathy with the joy of the fish in the Zhuangzi anecdote becomes the metaphor for Daoist wisdom. But effacing the boundaries between self and other is also associated with anguish over mortality. This doubleness becomes obvious in the stories developing the topos of metamorphosis into a fish: enjoyment of the freedom of the fish-state invariably gives way to despair and self-alienation. Even as Daoism purports to overcome such contradictions through the philosophical transcendence of opposites, the stories we examined frame the metamorphosis into fish as redemptive, whereby fear and anguish pave the way for compassion, detachment, and enlightenment. Yet negativity is not totally overcome and resurfaces as contradictions inherent to aspirations of transcendence.

Insofar as mortality is fundamental to the human condition, to overcome mortality is to risk becoming inhuman, as is evident in the vision of the Queen Mother of the West in "Poetic Exposition on the Great One" and of feathered beings or half-animal creatures in "biographical accounts" of immortals. In early poetic visions of immortality, as well as in narratives of "becoming an immortal" (*chengxian*), the dialectics of sameness and difference govern the relationship between mundane reality and the immortal realm. In most cases, the immortal realm is palpably material, promising infinite extension and intensification of worldly powers and pleasures. Yet glimpses of the void are never far off, especially in the aerial journeys depicted in the *Chuci* and Han *fu* traditions, where ideals of quiescence and disengagement in philosophical Daoism become, somewhat incongruously, the impetus to, as well as necessary preparation for, the quest for immortality. In later fiction, such as the sixteenth-century vernacular stories we discussed, immortality is enmeshed in unabashedly worldly concerns; yet even in those examples, indifference and abstemious self-cultivation are necessary steps for attaining immortality.

The subjective correlative of the paradoxical relationship between mundane reality and the immortal realm is the process of enlightenment, especially the moment of decisive self-transformation, which often entails ruptures and contradictions in the representation of consciousness. In some ways, the topos of metamorphosis in the fish stories dramatizes such discontinuities. More generally, both Daoist and Buddhist enlightenment enjoin ultimate detachment (including indifference to one's own body, death, and enlightenment), which coexists uneasily with the persistence of worldly powers and pleasures in the Daoist immortal realm and with the role of compassion in the Buddhist salvational scheme. The passage from attachment to detachment in literary examples is often fraught with irony and unresolved contradictions. In terms of aesthetic communication, visions of the void

and sublime indifference also threaten to undermine the reader's empathic identification with the character attaining enlightenment. As we have seen, poets and, more frequently, fiction writers have turned this potential problem into half-playful, half-earnest claims for aesthetic mediation. The negation of sensuous reality is used to bracket the enacted illusion in gestures of aesthetic self-reflexivity, and aesthetic contemplation or engagement with the fictional illusion is proposed as a venue of transcendence, whereby the reader is transformed as he engages with accounts of self-transformation.

Notes

1. *Zhuangzi zuanjian* 1960, 17.137. Hereafter ZZ in text and notes. All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

2. In *Taiping Guangji* 1981, 471: 3381–83. Hereafter *TPGT* in text and notes. For English translations of this story, see Kao 1985, 266–69 (trans. Douglas Wilkerson); Wang 1944, 225–27.

3. "Lang Xian" is a pseudonym that means "Unrestrained Immortal"; his real name is not known. The story is found in Feng 1989, 3.16, 332–346. Robert Ashmore translates this story in Owen 1996, 856–79.

4. Xue Wei cannot jump over the gate "and returned with a dotted forehead." At this point the narrator indulges in a digressive pseudoexplanation: "Because when carp have to jump the Dragon Gate, they are going up against water currents; they thus concentrate all their blood and energy in the head, as if a red brush has made red dots on their foreheads. That is why people call those who fail examinations 'dotted foreheads' " (Feng 1989, 3.337).

5. Ueda 1959, 70–76; for an English translation, see Hanada 1972, 114–22. The translations here are based on Hanada's.

6. This reverses a common topos in Buddhist stories that cautions against the taking of life in all forms, when as retribution a person is transformed into the animal he kills and eats.

7. Cited in Qian 1980, 1:349.

8. Here I include some (by no means exhaustive) examples from the seven "inner chapters" (*neipian*), conventionally attributed to the historical Zhuangzi. There are many more examples from the "outer" (*waipian*, 8–22) and "miscellaneous chapters" (*zapian*, 23–33), which are designated as the writings of the school of Zhuangzi.

9. See also the descriptions of the supreme being (*zhiren*) in ZZ 2.20 and of the true being (*zhenren*) in ZZ 6.47–48. For images of transcendence based on flight and transmundane wandering, see ZZ 2.20–21, 6.56, 7.62, 11.84, 11.86, 12.93, 17.136, 22.198.

10. Perhaps this explains why Zhuangzi, unlike Laozi, is usually not assimilated into the pantheon of deities in religious Daoism.

11. See Wen 1997, 259–87; Xu 1986, 99–111; Shaughnessy 1991, 170, 173, 191; Yu 1964–65, 81–122.

12. See Yu 1964–65, 87; Xu 1986, 108–11.

13. Gu Yanwu (1613–82) notes that the cult of immortality began at the end of Zhou (i.e., fourth–third cent. B.C.E.) (see Gu 1990, 30.715). He also suggests, in *Advantages and Disadvantages of All the Prefectures and Regions under Heaven* (*Tianxia junguo libing shu*), that the cult originated in the coastal states Qi and Yan, where the ocean and its mirages stimulated the imagination (cited in Yu 1964–65, 89, n. 37). Wen Yiduo refutes this view and claims that the cult came from the Qiang people, who had ties with the state of Qi (Wen 1997, 260–65). Xu Zhongshu claims that the northern Di people brought the cult to China

(Xu 1986, 109–10). Yu Ying-shih summarizes and discusses these views and concludes that the cult is of indigenous origins (Yu 1964–65, 88–89).

14. Yu Ying-shih links the emphasis on "life" (*sheng*) in Warring States and Han thought to the emergence of a more worldly conception of immortality (see Yu 1964–65, 81–91).

15. By contrast, narrative accounts, such as *The Arrayed Biographies of Immortals* attributed to Liu Xiang or *The Biographies of Divine Immortals* (*Shenxian zhuan*) attributed to Ge Hong, seldom dwell on the Daoist rhetoric of nonbeing. In forms derived from official historiography, these works give matter-of-fact descriptions of the attributes and "histories" of immortals.

16. Both are translated in Owen 1996, 176–84; "Distant Roaming" appears in Hawkes 1959, 81–87. The date of "Distant Roaming" is not certain. It is traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan and dated to third cent. B.C.E., but many modern scholars (e.g., Hawkes) believe it is an early Han work. Questions of priority and direction of influence with these two works are still widely debated. "The Poetic Exposition on the Great One" is incorporated into Sima Qian's biography of Sima Xiangru (1975, 117.2999–3074). For an annotated edition, see Sima Xiangru 1993, 92–110. "Poetic exposition" is Owen's translation of the Chinese genre *fu*, a mixture of prose and poetry, with various combinations of expository, descriptive, and lyrical passages. The term *fu* has also been rendered as rhapsody (Knechtges 1976), rhyme-prose (Watson 1971), and prose-poem (Mair, 1994).

17. The *Chuci* is a collection that includes songs and writings of the Chu culture (ca. sixth–third cents. B.C.E.) and early Han (206 B.C.E.-C.E. 220) imitations of such works. The *Chuci* was first compiled and designated as such by the Han exegete Wang Yi (ca. A.D. 89–158 C.E.). For a complete English translation, see Hawkes 1959. Cf. Owen 1996, 156–81. My translations are based on Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) *Chuci jizhu*, hereafter *CC* in the text and notes.

18. David Hawkes discusses the transference and displacement of ritual formulas in the *Chuci* corpus (Hawkes 1974, 42–68).

19. Pengxian also appears earlier in "Encountering Sorrow" and in "Nine Works" ("Jiuzhang").

20. That is, Red Pine's being is so pure that even the dust he stirs is unsullied. An alternative reading may be that he "purifies dust," perhaps because he is Master of Rain under the legendary Shennong emperor (see Liu, 1a, 1960). Zhang Liang, chief advisor and strategist of the first Han emperor, Liu Bang, left office because he "wished to abandon worldly affairs, follow and wander with Master Red Pine" (*Sima Qian* 1975, 55.2048 hereafter *SJ* in text and notes).

21. Liu, 1b–2a, 1960. In *Records of the Historian*, the *fangshi* magician Shen Gong gives a different account, whereby about seventy ministers and consorts ascend with the Yellow Emperor. It is only the minor officials who fail to rise despite attempts to hang on to the dragon's beard and the ruler's bow (*SJ* 28.1394).

22. Liu, 6a, 1960; see also *TPGJ* 4.24.

23. Because of associations with flight and ascension, immortals are sometimes described as sprouting wings or assuming the form of birds, hence "feathered beings." Danqiu (literally, Cinnabar Hill) is a place illumined day and night. For references to the "undying people" (*busi min*), "the kingdom of the undying" (*busi zhi guo*), "the fields of the undying" (*busi zhi ye*), and "the trees of the undying" (*busi shu*) in classical texts such as *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shanhai jing*, comp. ca. third–second cent. B.C.E.?), *Huainan zi* (ca. second cent. B.C.E.), *Heavenly Questions* (*Tian wen*, ca. third cent. B.C.E.), see Wen 1997, 274–76, n. 8. In these examples, there are frequent references to the color black and to the far western region of China.

24. According to the *Liji* (ca. second–first cent. B.C.E.) 1981, 11.11b, the "material soul" (*po*) sinks and the "spiritual soul" (*hun*) rises upon a person's death.

25. Precedents for these images are found in "Encountering Sorrow," but in that poem such tokens of power are interwoven with moments of frustration and helplessness.

26. Pingyi is here apparently an emissary of the gods, although various sources identify Pingyi as the god associated with wind, rain, or thunder.

27. In the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shanhai jing*), the Queen Mother of the West is a "human-like creature with leopard tail and tiger teeth, she is adept at whistling and wears ornaments in her unkempt hair" (*Shanhai jing* 1987, 2.48). In almost all other sources, however, she appears as a beautiful woman of regal bearing.

28. According to *Huainan zi*, the "three-footed crow" lives in the sun (Liu 1989, 7.221). The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* associates the Queen Mother of the West with "three blue birds," who have been substituted for the "three-footed crow" in some amendations of the text (*Shanhai jing* 1987, 2.49, 11.170, 16.199; Sima Xiangru 1993, 105–6, n. 38).

29. Ge Hong, 1960, 1.3b–4b.

30. Ibid., 1985, 2.20; see also "Liu Gen," in *TPGJ*, 10.67–69.

31. Ibid., 1960, 2.6a; *TPGJ* 7.44.

32. The Chinese text is often included in anthologies of poetic expositions. See, for example, Zhang 1993, 208–16. For an English translation, see Owen 1996, 185–89.

33. From the proverb "A person who has accumulated a thousand pieces of gold does not sit under the eaves," that is, tiles falling from eaves can hit a person on the head, quoted in *SJ* 117.3054.

34. A good example is Dong Yue's (1620–86) *Supplement to Journey to the West*, whose protagonist, Monkey, transforms himself into the Six-Eared Ape, the creature who impersonates Monkey in *Journey to the West*. One of Monkey's tricks in *Journey to the West* is to create legions of replicas by transforming hair on his body into "Monkeys." In the *Supplement*, these "Fine-haired Monkeys" declare independence, wreak havoc, and call into question the meanings of self-division, relationship between self and role, essence and manifestation.

35. The English translation of the story by James Hightower appears in Lau 1978, 416–19.

36. Duan 1982, 235–36.

37. Xuan Zang 1958, 5.576–78. Cf. Duan 1987, 236; Qian 1980, 2:655.

38. That is, to see without seeing, to hear without hearing, to cut onself off from sensory reality, reverse the direction of perception and turn inward. There are obvious echoes of Daoist quietism. The line appears in Lu Ji's (261–303) "Poetic Exposition on Literature" ("Wen fu").

39. Feng 1989, 3.37, 495–510.

40. The philosopher Laozi is absorbed into the pantheon of Daoist deities.

41. The historical Liu An, prince of Huainan, was executed for treason, possibly pushed to rebellion by the suspicions of Emperor Wu. In a twist of poetic justice, the Liu An of immortality lore is the object of Emperor Wu's envy. His quest for immortality is so successful that even chickens and dogs who lick the remnant elixir left in vessels in the courtyard all manage to ascend to heaven. "That was why cocks crow in the sky and dogs bark among the clouds" (*TPGJ* 8.51–53).

42. Cf. Yu 1997.

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WENDY DONIGER

Transformations of Subjectivity and Memory in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Many myths in the Epics and Purāṇas involve either transvestism (dressing as someone of the other gender) or transsexuality (transformation into someone of the other sex). Vedantic philosophy produced many male dream doubles, of whom the most famous is Nārada, who became a woman and lived a full life but eventually returned to his life as a man.[1] Much has been written about transsexual myths in Hinduism,[2] but I wish to concentrate here on transsexual myths that shed light upon the nature of human identity.

In the great Sanskrit epic the *Mahābhārata* composed between about 300 B.C.E. and 300 C.E., several people lose their subjectivity, often their memories, to become someone else, sometimes as the result of a curse, sometimes out of a desire to become other. Nala is transformed into a deformed dwarf; Arjuna disguises himself as a transvestite who may or may not be impotent; Yayāti becomes a young man. In the other great Sanskrit Epic, the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* (which I will call, henceforth, the *Rāmāyaṇa*), composed within roughly the same period, the transformations generally take place on both a higher and a lower register: the demons create spectacular illusions, but the human characters in general do not undergo nearly so many transformations as their counterparts in the *Mahābhārata*.[3] One story on the margins of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, depicts the transformation of a human being—Ila, not one of the central characters—in ways strikingly similar to the transformations of a slightly more central character in the *Mahābhārata*—Ambā. Both are stories of sexual transformation: in one, a man becomes a woman (known as MTF in the trade nowadays, male to female), and in the other, a woman a man (FTM, female to male). Let us consider these stories of male and female sexual transformation one by one, and then together.

The *Mahābhārata* tells us, rather cryptically, that a woman named Ilā gave birth to Purūravas and became both his mother and his father.[4] In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ila's birth is sexually ambiguous, and his/her adult sexual life is so problematic that it sometimes becomes convenient, in discussing this myth (and others in this essay),

to use at ambiguous moments the otherwise awkward modern nonsexist pronoun s/he to describe him/her.

The Transformation of Ila

When Śiva was making love with Pārvatī, he had taken the form of a woman to please her, and everything in that part of the woods, even trees, had become female.[5] One day, King Ila, the son of Kardama, went hunting and killed thousands of animals, but still his lust for hunting was unsatisfied. As he came to that place where Śiva was making love with Pārvatī, he was turned into a woman, and when she approached Śiva to seek relief from her misery, Śiva laughed and said, "Ask for any boon except manhood." Ila pleaded with Pārvatī, who said: "Śiva will grant half of your request, and I the other half. In that way you will be half female, half male." Rejoicing at this wonderful boon from the goddess, Ila said, "If you, whose form is unrivaled by any copy, are truly pleased with me, let me be a woman for a month, and then a man again for a month." "So be it," said Pārvatī, "but when you are a man, you will not remember that you were a woman; and when you are a woman, you will not remember that you were a man." "So be it," said the king, and for a month she became the most beautiful woman in the world.

During that first month, she was wandering in the forest [outside the magic grove] with her female attendants, who had formerly been men, when she came upon King Budha, the son of the moon, immersed in a lake and immersed in meditation. She was struck by his stunning good looks and started splashing the water; he noticed her and was pierced by the arrows of lust. He thought to himself, "I have never seen a woman like this, not among goddesses or snake women or demon women or celestial courtesans. If she is not married, let her be mine." He asked her followers whose she was, and they replied, "This woman with superb hips rules over us; she has no husband and wanders with us in the woods." When he heard this speech, whose meaning was obscure, Budha used his own magic powers and discovered the entire truth of what had happened to the king. He transformed the women into centaurs [*kiṃpuruṣas*], and they ran away. Then he smiled and said to Ilā, "I am the son of king Soma; look upon me with loving eyes, and make love with me." In that deserted place, deprived of all her attendant women, she spoke pleasingly to him, saying, "Son of Soma, I am free to do as I wish, and so I place myself in your power. Do with me as you wish." Hearing that astonishing speech from her, the king was thrilled, and he caused Ilā to enjoy the exquisite pleasures of love-making, for a month which passed like a moment.

But when the month was full, Ila the son of the Prajāpati awoke in the bed and saw Budha immersed in the water, immersed in meditation. He said to Budha, "Sir, I came to this inaccessible mountain with my attendants. But now I don't see my army; where have all my people gone?" When Budha heard these words from Ila, whose power of recognition had been destroyed, he replied with a persuasive, conciliating speech: "Your servants were all destroyed by a hailstorm, and you were exhausted by your terror of the high winds and fell asleep on the grounds of this hermitage. Don't be afraid; live here in comfort, eating fruits and roots."

Though the wise king Ila was encouraged when he heard those words, he was greatly saddened by the death of his servants, and he said, "I will renounce my own kingdom; I cannot go on for a moment without my servants and wives. Please give me leave to go. My eldest son, named Śaśabindu, will inherit my throne." But Budha said, "Please live here. Don't worry. At the end of a year, O son of Kardama, I will do you a great favor." And so Ila decided to stay there.

> Then, for a month she became a woman and enjoyed the pleasure of making love ceaselessly, sleeplessly, and then for a month he increased his understanding of dharma, as a man. In the ninth month, Ilā, who had superb hips, brought forth a son fathered by Budha, named Purūravas. And as soon as he was born, she placed him in the hands of Budha, for he looked just like him and seemed to be of the same class. And then when she became a man again, Budha gave him the pleasure of hearing stories about dharma, for a year.
>
> Then Budha summoned a number of sages, including Ila's father, Kardama, and asked them to do what was best for him/her. Kardama suggested that they propitiate Śiva with a horse-sacrifice and ask his help. Śiva was pleased by the horse-sacrifice; he came to them, gave Ila his manhood, and vanished. King Ila ruled in the middle country of Pratiṣṭhāna, and his son Śaśabindu ruled in their country of Bahli.[6]

The story of Ila is told in many of the medieval Sanskrit texts called the Purāṇas, since s/he founded both of the two great Indian dynasties, the lunar and the solar, and dynastic succession is a central concern of the Purāṇas. The myth tells of the joining of the descendant of the Sun (Ila, grandson of Vivasvant, the Sun) with a descendant of the Moon (Budha, son of Soma, the moon; his son is named Śaśabindu, "Hare-marked," an epithet of the moon, in which the Hindus see a hare where we see a man). The sexual labyrinths of the text may have been generated, at least in part, through a desire to account for the joining of two great dynasties, each claiming descent from a male cosmic body (for both the sun and the moon are usually male in Sanskrit), without demoting either partner to the inferior status of a female. The solution: to imagine two cosmic patriarchs, and to turn one — only temporarily, of course — into a woman. (The parallel desire, to have a child born of both the gods Śiva and Viṣṇu, was resolved by turning Viṣṇu, temporarily, into a woman, Mohinī.)[7] The form of the curse in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is no accident; the founding of the lunar dynasty is linked, by natural association, with the monthly vacillation between female and male. On the other hand, the fact that one person, Budha, has the power and the knowledge and undiminished masculinity throughout the episode, while the other, Ila, does not, would seem to privilege the status of Budha and the lunar dynasty over Ila and the solar dynasty; and that may well have been one of the intentions of this text.

There are scattered references here to the problem of recognition, all refractions of the central problem, namely, that when s/he is transformed into a woman, Ila does not recognize himself. One aspect of recognition is resemblance: Does one self resemble another? Thus, in praising the Goddess, Ilā says that her form is "unrivaled by any copy" (*pratimā*, a reflected image); Budha says that he has never seen "a woman like this"; and their child is said to look just like him or to "seem to be of the same class or kind" (*savarṇa*). When Ila does not recognize himself after he has been restored to his primary form as a man, he is said to be someone whose power of recognition (*saṃjñā*) has been destroyed; as a woman, in his *secondary* form, she is not himself, but only his (female) shadow or inverted mirror image (*pratimā*).

But recognition also involves memory, and part of the curse (or is it the boon that balances the curse?) is to make Ila forget one gender when s/he is immersed in another. In the initial transformation, in the enchanted forest, Ila apparently does retain his memory, for he asks the gods to change him back; at this stage, he would

seem to have the body of a woman and the mind of a man. When, however, the transformation has settled into monthly alternations, Ila forgets who he is; her servants tell Budha the story that we must assume Ilā, too, believes, that she is a woman without a husband, wandering in the woods. Ila doesn't remember her pleasure in bed when he is a man. In fact, Pārvatī explicitly states that s/he will not remember the altered states; is this because normally one would, or normally one would not, remember? Budha doesn't tell Ilā who she is, though he knows this through powers of his own; he withholds Ila's memory from her/him and keeps him/her in his power. By cutting him/her off from the knowledge of his/her true identity and then seducing him/her, Budha is in effect raping a sleeping woman, engaging in what Hindu law classifies as the "marriage of a ghoul," which "takes place when a man secretly has sex with a girl who is asleep, drunk, or out of her mind."[8] (We, too, have legal sanctions against the rape of an insane woman.) In this case, she is quite literally out of her mind, and into someone else's, and the text does not rest until s/he is restored to his/her manhood (*puruṣatva*) again—this being the "favor" that Budha cryptically promises to do for him at the end of the year.

Ila is disempowered by the loss of both sex and class: in one stroke s/he is deprived of political power, class (servants), and gender. As soon as s/he becomes a woman, even while s/he still has servants (class), s/he loses his/her ownership of his/herself; Budha asks her followers whose she is, the standard way of inquiring about a woman's identity in ancient India (to which the standard answer consists of her father's name, if she is unmarried, or her husband's, if she is married; this is the question that the followers answer "obscurely"). And of course s/he also loses his/her political power, both because s/he forgets that s/he is a king and because a woman cannot (except in extraordinary circumstances) be a king. When Budha pulls out from under him/her the one remaining prop, his/her servants, she finds herself alone with him in the middle of the forest, helpless. Naturally, she gives in to his sexual demands.

But even when Ila becomes retransformed into a man, he remains helpless for reasons of class that remain even when gender has been restored. Thus he remarks, "I cannot live without my servants and wives." He has lost a significant part of his identity by losing his social world. Men, in this worldview, are dependent on women for services, and women are dependent on men for protection. But they are also mutually dependent for sex. We have already been told that Ilā is, as it were, "asking for it." We know that she lusted for him before he lusted for her, and, indeed, that even as a man, Ila suffered from the fatal and quasi-sexual lust to hunt. One text makes explicit this connection between hunting (especially hunting people whom you have mistaken for animals) and gender transformation: "One day, a female goblin [*yakṣiṇī*] who wanted to protect her husband from king Ila took the form of a deer expressly in order to lure him into the magic part of the forest. King Ila entered the wood."[9] It is surely significant that Ila is hunting females—whether demons or deer—when he is lured into the forest where he will be cured, at least temporarily, of his passion for hunting.

Budha keeps Ilā captive not only by lying to her but by giving her pleasure, as she gives pleasure to him (the verb for sexual enjoyment, *ram*, is consistently used in the causative both for him and for her). Even when she becomes a man, Budha

gives him the pleasure of hearing stories, using the same verb, *ram*, for sexual pleasure and for what Roland Barthes has taught us to call the pleasure of the text. But in this mutual dependence, the woman is far more dependent on sex than the man is. Thus, in a parallel story about a man, Bhaṅgāśvana, magically transformed into a female, when Indra (the king of the gods) asks him/her which sex s/he would like to remain forevermore, s/he says that s/he would prefer to remain a woman, since as a woman s/he had greater pleasure in sex—which also makes her love the children she had as a woman more than the children she had as a man.[10] (In other texts it is said that a woman has eight times as much pleasure, or, sometimes, eight times as much desire—not the same thing at all—as a man.)[11] The Buddhist transsexual, Soreyya, also has children both as male and as female and prefers the children of his female persona to those of the male. (No one seems to have dared to ask him which way sex was better.)[12] Yet, even this greater pleasure does not ultimately weigh in the scale of gender against the disadvantages of being a woman: Ila chooses not to remain female.

In some variants of this myth, Ila begins life not as a male but as a female, which puts a special spin on the story:

> Ila's parents had wanted a boy; but the priest had made a mistake, and so a girl was born instead, named Ilā. The priest then rectified his error, and she became a man, named Ila. One day when Śiva and Pārvatī were making love, the sages came to see Śiva. Pārvatī was naked, and when she saw them she became ashamed and arose from Śiva's embrace, tying her waist-cloth around her loins. The sages, seeing that the couple were making love, turned back. Then, to please his beloved, Śiva said, "Whoever enters this place will become a female." Some time later, Ila reached this spot and became a woman, and all the men in his/her entourage became women, and all their stallions became mares. Queen Ilā, as she had become again, married and gave birth to King Purūravas. Eventually she begged Śiva to change her back to a man, named Sudyumna, and s/he was allowed to be a woman for one month and a man for one month. Eventually, s/he went to heaven as someone who had the distinguishing signs of both men and women.[13]

It might be argued that, even here, Ila begins as a male, since it was the original desire of his parents (like all Hindu parents) to have a boy. But since his first physical form is that of a female, his final physical transformation (after he has become a man) is in effect a transformation back into her original physical nature. The text therefore constantly fights its way upstream against the current of Ila's tendency to revert to female type and requires constant interventions from male powers (gods or priest) to keep making her male. Even in heaven, s/he still has both sets of distinguishing marks [*lakṣaṇa*], which here cancel one another out and therefore distinguish nothing.

Another variant of this myth reverses the force of both memory and gender:

> Ela, who would have been king of the lunar dynasty, came to the Sāhya mountain, greedy for hunting, but when he entered the forest he became Ilā, an identical shadow of Ela, and when his soldiers saw Ilā from a distance, they fled in terror. Ilā became a female companion and servant of the goddess Pārvatī. Though s/he learned that if she bathed in the river as a woman she would be released, Ilā said s/he preferred to be a slave to Gaṅgā [the river Ganges] and Gaurī. Gaṅgā and

> Gaurī, however, quickly replied, "To hell with birth as a woman; it's nothing but pain and grief," and so Ilā entered the water and bathed in a special pool and emerged as King Ela, a man. The face that had been as beautiful as the moon was now bearded and deep-voiced, and the female sex that she had acquired through the curse of Pārvatī was now a male sex (*liṅga*).[14]

This text makes brutally explicit the fact that it is a bad thing to be a woman, and clearly implicit the fact that, for once, Ila is conscious of his male past in the midst of his female present and therefore able to make a choice. Idiotically, it seems, or for religious reasons that have motivated many devotees of both the goddess and Kṛṣṇa, in India, he chooses to be a woman, but the women around him quickly enlighten him, and he rejoins his true self, his true gender.

A tale in the *Ocean of the Rivers of Story* is related to the story of Ila and even cites it as a proof text:

> A man named Śaśin, a friend of the great trickster and magician Mūladeva, was in love with a princess who was closely guarded in a harim. Mūladeva gave Śaśin a pill to put into his mouth (not to swallow), which turned him into a woman so that he could gain access to the harim. Mūladeva himself took another pill that transformed him into an old Brahmin. Once inside the harim, Śaśin took the pill out of his mouth, became a man, and made love to his princess. After a while, a prince saw Śaśin when he was in his form as a woman and insisted on taking "her" as his wife; Śaśin insisted that the marriage not be consummated for six months, during which she lived in the harim with the prince's first wife, the queen. One night she told the queen the story of Ila and the forest of Pārvatī, took the pill out of his mouth, and made love to her, too. Eventually, Mūladeva married the princess secretly, while Śaśin married her officially.[15]

Śaśin, like Śaśabindu, is a name of the moon, appropriate for someone who periodically changes form (for six months, too). Since he remains male inside even when his body becomes female, the text can imagine him making love only to women, never to men.

In all the texts we have seen, with the exception of the glorification of the Sāhya forest, Ila is the passive victim of a curse; he loses his memory when he loses his body. Significantly, Ilā's transition to and from her existence as the wife of king Budha takes place, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Budha is meditating in the water — precisely the condition of the sage Nārada's very similar translation into and out of womanhood.

Ila's neat trick in both fathering and mothering his/her son is also accomplished by the father of the monkey heroes Vālin and Sugrīva in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who does it serially — first he is the father, and then the mother, and then the father again:

> *The Monkey and His Reflection*
>
> One day a great monkey named Ṛkṣarāja saw the reflection of his own face in a lake. Thinking that it was an enemy mocking him, in his monkey foolishness he plunged into the water, but when he came out of the water he was a beautiful woman. The gods Indra and Sūrya [the Sun] desired her and were overpowered by lust. Indra shed his seed on her head before he actually managed to consummate the act, and then he turned back; but because Indra's seed is never shed in vain, she gave birth to a king of the monkeys; and because the seed had fallen in her hair

> [*vāla*], he was named Vālin. The seed of Sūrya, when he was overpowered by lust, was sprinkled on her neck; he said not a single good word but regained control and reined in his lust; Sugrīva was born from the semen that had fallen on her neck [*grīva*]. Then the two gods went away, and when the sun rose after that night had passed, Ṛkṣarāja resumed his own monkey shape and saw his two sons. He suckled them with honey and took them home. Thus the monkey Ṛkṣarāja was the father of Vālin and Sugrīva, and also their mother.[16]

Like Narcissus in Greek and Roman mythology, the monkey mistakes his reflection for another human being—not, this time, a potential sexual partner, but a mocking enemy. The result is much the same, however: the myth short-circuits the Narcissus connection so that the monkey does not mate with his reflection as if it were someone of the other sex, but becomes his sexual reflection, as it were—and mates with someone else. (Indeed, he mates with two other men who double one another, even as his female self doubles his male self). Here, as so often, the myth reifies and embodies a cliché: we often speak of a single parent as being "both mother and father" to a child; in Indian myths, it actually happens. Indeed, this story gives new meaning to another cliché: "single parent."

Since Ṛkṣarāja is a serial rather than a simultaneous androgyne, his male and female parts are never able to meet and mate; the gods must descend, ex machina, to substitute their sperm for that of the usually required male monkey, to allow him to impregnate himself. Ṛkṣarāja simultaneously changes gender and species: a male monkey becomes a human (or at least anthropomorphic) woman. But his monkeyness prevails: though two gods more or less artificially inseminate a woman, the resulting children are neither gods nor humans, but monkeys, the true, underlying form of the father. Something of his true self remains in place despite the double transformation.

The transformation of a male into a female, as in the stories of Ila and Ṛkṣarāja, is the predominant form of transformation in India. The corresponding transformation of women into men is both rarer and more destructive. A typically lethal transsexual from the *Mahābhārata* is Ambā, whose story is told in fragments scattered throughout the long text:

> *The Revenge of Ambā/Śikhaṇḍin/ī*
>
> Bhīṣma had gone to find wives for his brother, Vicitryavīrya; he took Ambā and her three sisters by force. But when he learned that Ambā had given her heart to another man who loved her, Bhīṣma sent her back to her betrothed lover, King Śālva [1.96.45–53]. Śālva, however, refused to accept a woman who had been carried off by another man; caught in the middle, Ambā cursed Bhīṣma and became an ascetic in order to amass the power to kill him. The Ganges, Bhīṣma's mother, tried at first to dissuade Ambā and then cursed her to become a crooked river, dried up except in monsoon and teeming with crocodiles. Ambā did become a river, but only with one half of her body; the other half remained a woman and propitiated Śiva, saying, "Because of Bhīṣma I have come to this eternally miserable state, neither a man nor a woman. I am disgusted with the condition of being a woman and have determined to become a man. I want to pay Bhīṣma back." Śiva promised her that she would become a man who would kill Bhīṣma, and that she would remember everything when she had taken on a new body. Then she entered the fire and died [5.170–187].

> Now, King Drupada, whose wife had had no sons, asked Śiva for a son, but Śiva said, "You will have a male child who is a female." In time, the queen gave birth to a daughter, but she and the king pretended it was a son and raised the child as a son, whom they called Śikhaṇḍin. Only the parents and Bhīṣma knew the truth, from a spy, from Nārada's report, from the words of the god [Śiva], and from Ambā's asceticism. When the child reached maturity, "he" married a princess; but when the princess found out that her husband was a woman, she was humiliated, and her father waged war on King Drupada. Drupada, who had known all along, pretended that he had been deceived by the queen, and she swore to this.
>
> When Drupada's daughter, Śikhaṇḍinī, saw the grief and danger she had caused her parents, she resolved to kill herself, and she went into the deserted forest. There she met a goblin [*yakṣa*] named Sthūṇa ("Pillar") and begged him to use his magic to turn her into a man. The goblin said that he would give her his own sign of manhood [*puṃ-liṅga*] for a short time, if she would promise to return it to him after the armies left the city; meanwhile, he would wear her sign of womanhood [*strī-liṅga*]. They made this agreement and exchanged sexual organs. When Drupada learned from Śikhaṇḍin what had happened, he rejoiced and sent word to the attacking king that the bridegroom was in fact a man. The king sent some fine young women to learn whether Śikhaṇḍin was female or male, and they happily reported that he was absolutely male. The father of Śikhaṇḍin's bride rebuked his daughter and went home, and Śikhaṇḍinī [sic!] was delighted.
>
> Meanwhile, Kubera, the lord of the goblins, found out what had happened and cursed Sthūṇa to remaine female forever and Śikhaṇḍin to remain male forever—or, rather (in response to Sthūṇa's pleas) to remain male until Śikhaṇḍin's death, when Sthūṇa would regain his own form. When Śikhaṇḍin returned to Sthūṇa to keep his part of the bargain, he learned of Kubera's curse and returned to the city, rejoicing [5.188–93].
>
> Now, Bhīṣma had vowed not to shoot at a woman, anyone who used to be a woman or has a woman's name or appears to be a woman [5.193.60–65]. Śikhaṇḍin attacked Bhīṣma, but Bhīṣma, regarding him as someone made of a woman [*strīmaya*], did not return the attack [6.99.4–7]. Arjuna said, "Put Śikhaṇḍin in front; Bhīṣma has said he won't fight with him because he was born a woman" [6.103.100]. When Śikhaṇḍin shot arrows at Bhīṣma, Bhīṣma repelled them playfully, laughing as he remembered the femaleness of Śikhaṇḍin. But he did not strike Śikhaṇḍin, and he [Śikhaṇḍin] did not understand. Then Arjuna and the rest of the Pāṇḍavas used Śikhaṇḍin as a shield in their vanguard, and Bhīṣma fell under the rain of their arrows [6.112.80].
>
> Later, in the night raid, Śikhaṇḍin attacked Aśvatthāman and struck him between his two eyebrows; furious, Aśvatthāman attacked Śikhaṇḍin and cut him in half [10.8.58–9]. After Bhīṣma died, the Ganges, his mother, lamented, "At the self-choice in the city of Vārāṇasī he conquered the warriors and carried off the women, and no one on earth could equal him. How is it that my heart did not break when I heard that Śikhaṇḍin killed him!" Kṛṣṇa said, "Do not grieve; he was killed by Arjuna, not by Śikhaṇḍin" [13.154.19–29].

Ambā is caught in limbo between two men, her beloved and the man who abducted her; she is socially, if not physically, raped by Bhīṣma (for his abduction of her made her secondhand goods from the standpoint of the man she loved) and then rejected by Bhīṣma as well as by her betrothed lover. In her own view, this makes her neither man nor woman—the phrase often used to describe a *klība*; that is, she equates her liminal sexuality with androgyny.

A *klība* is not merely an androgyne; where androgyne implies a male-female equality and a creature of mythological status, with some power and dignity, a *klība* is a defective male, a male suffering from failure, distortion, and lack. This word has traditionally been translated as "eunuch," but it meant anything but a eunuch (a practice that only entered India centuries after the word *klība* became current). Rather, as we learn from the *Laws of Manu*, it includes a wide range of meanings under the general homophobic rubric of "a man who does not act the way a man should act," a man who fails to be a man. It is a catchall term coined by a homophobic Hindu culture to indicate a man who is in their terms sexually dysfunctional (or, in ours, sexually challenged), including someone who was sterile, impotent, castrated, a transvestite, a man who committed fellatio with other men or who had anal sex, a man with mutilated or defective sexual organs, a man who produces only female children, or, finally, a hermaphrodite. When a culture does not want to confront an issue, it produces a haze of obfuscating terms that can be used for a wide range of pejorative purposes; *klība* is such a term. The phrase "neither man nor woman" is also used to described a Hijra, a kind of transvestite eunuch in contemporary India (indeed, the phrase is used as the title of the best book I know about Hijras).[17]

Ambā epitomizes the no-win situation of a woman tossed like a shuttlecock between two men, each of whom ricochets between inflicting upon her sexual excess or sexual rejection. And when she becomes a man, that is precisely the sort of doubly hurtful man she becomes: the liminal Śikhaṇḍin/Śikhaṇḍinī rejects her bride, who is humiliated as Ambā had been, and unsexes (and humiliates) a helpful goblin. His/her sexual ambivalence is itself ambivalent, or at least doubled: s/he is a female first masquerading as a male and then transformed into a male. And there are further echoes of Śikhaṇḍin's tendency to split in two: before undertaking asceticism herself, Ambā chooses as her champion Rāma-with-an-Axe, Paraśurāma, who cut his own mother in two, just as Aśvatthāman cuts Śikhaṇḍin in two when he kills him. And Ambā is cursed by the motherly river, Gaṅgā, to become a deadly river, devoid of fluids and teeming with toothy crocodiles, and then is further split between that river and the form of a woman.

Śikhaṇḍin does not seem to remember that s/he was Ambā, even though Śiva expressly promises her that she will remember (just as Pārvatī promised Ila that he would not remember—is there a significant gendered difference here?). Śikhaṇḍin knows he was Śikhaṇḍinī, but apparently not that he was Ambā. Indeed, since Śikhaṇḍin/ī has no voice, we don't really know what s/he knows; s/he can't even act but is used as a screen. Because s/he does not remember, s/he doesn't "understand" when Bhīṣma won't fight with him/her. Despite Śiva's promise, memory here does not survive rebirth, even rebirth as someone of the same sex (though a different gender!). And the killing of Bhīṣma by Śikhaṇḍin is rather anticlimatic and further blurred by its diffusion: Śikhaṇḍin does not kill Bhīṣma outright but merely functions as a human bulwark for Arjuna (one androgyne behind another); and Bhīṣma does not die immediately of his wounds but withdraws and dies long, long afterward. Śikhaṇḍin himself takes part in the night raid that violates the injunction against killing someone asleep, just as Budha violates the injunction against violating someone asleep.

But if Śikhaṇḍin does not remember, Bhīṣma certainly does; he has the whip hand over her in this, too, though it seems to be more important to him that Śikh-

aṇḍin was born a woman (Śikhaṇḍinī) in this life than that she was a woman in a former life (Ambā), let alone a woman who died cursing his name and vowing to kill him. Bhīṣma explicitly notes, but no one seems to care, that Śikhaṇḍin was Ambā. There is something suspiciously idiosyncratic about Bhīṣma's vow not to "shoot at a woman, anyone who used to be a woman, or has a woman's name, or appears to be a woman."[18] Perhaps he invented the vow to protect her; he changes the wording each time he says it, and he says it often in justifying his refusal to fight with Śikhaṇḍin, almost as if he is ad-libbing.

But this vow opens a loophole clause for Bhīṣma's enemies in his otherwise complete invulnerability: only a woman can kill him, precisely because he regards a woman as so lowly that he would not stoop to defend himself against her. Thus the text implies that Śikhaṇḍin retained her female gender when she lost her female sexuality. Indeed, it is imperative for Bhīṣma that Śikhaṇḍin is in essence (in this case, in gender) a woman, despite her outer male form. This mythological loophole is a variant of the observation that men, by ignoring the differences between women (or others whom they dominate), can be tricked and overcome by them, by what James Scott has called the weapons of the weak. It is also related to a theme that appears elsewhere in the Hindu Epics (and in Epics from other cultures): the villain blackmails the gods into granting him the boon that he can be killed by no one on a list that he formulates, but he omits people beneath his contempt, one of whom, sneaking under the radar of the protective boon, kills him. Thus Rāvaṇa obtained the boon that he could be killed only by a human (Rāma),[19] and, closer to our theme, the buffalo demon Mahīṣa obtained the boon that he could be killed only by a woman (inspiring the gods to create the goddess Devī).[20] In the case of Bhīṣma, the perfect solution, a creature with the technical status of a woman but the power of a man, is a murderous transsexual.

This ambiguity is also used in the self-definition of Hijras. Serena Nanda relates a story told to her by a Hijra:

> When Ram left Ayodhya to go to the forest, "the whole city followed him because they loved him so. As Ram came to the banks of the river at the edge of the forest, he turned to the people and said, 'Ladies and gents, please wipe your tears and go away.' But those people who were not men and not women did not know what to do. So they stayed there because Ram did not ask them to go. . . . And so they were blessed by Ram."[21]

Ambā's connection with Hijras has been appropriated by contemporary Indian politics, as Lawrence Cohen has noted in a cartoon that was plastered onto walls near a big political rally in 1993:

> A male figure representing the common man and labelled the *Śikhaṇḍin janatā* (*janatā* means the people and Śikhaṇḍin is the gender-bending warrior from the *Mahābhārata* epic, who for most Banarsis is thought to be like a hijra or eunuch) is shown bent over and raped at both ends by two other male figures, orally by a *gaṇḍu neta* or politician-bugger and anally by a *jhaṇḍu pulis* or useless policeman.[22]

This image is classical in two senses. First, it draws upon a political insight couched in sexual language already documented in an ancient *Brāhmaṇa* text about the horse-sacrifice, which speaks of a male who "thrusts the penis into the slit, and the vulva swallows it up," and glosses this statement: "The slit is the people, and the penis

is the royal power, which presses against the people, and so the one who has royal power is hurtful to the people."[23] As we would say, the king fucks the people. Second, Śikhaṇḍin himself was, in his previous life as Ambā, unraped, as it were—sexually rejected—at both ends: she was raped and rejected by Bhīṣma, and rejected by her betrothed lover. A very apt image indeed, but transformed, like Śikhaṇḍin himself, from the image of a woman to that of a man. Since the Epic is, in general, more sympathetic to women than is contemporary Indian culture, to make the metaphor powerful and meaningful the authors of the Banarsi cartoon had to transform the doubly unraped, but lethally vengeful, Ambā into the doubly raped Śikhaṇḍin—a man more raped than raping.

Bhīṣma's mother, shamed at the thought of her son's death at the hands of a man-woman, is consoled by being told that Bhīṣma was killed not by Śikhaṇḍin but by another sort of klība, Arjuna. Let us conclude with a look at this episode, the masquerade of Arjuna as the androgyne in the court of King Virāṭa, for the story of Ambā in many ways plays upon it, and it introduces yet another sort of transformation of the self—transvestism:

Arjuna the Androgyne

> The celestial courtesan Urvaśī fell in love with Arjuna and propositioned him, but he said she was like a mother to him and clapped his hands over his ears. Furious, the spurned nymph gave him a curse to be a dancer among women, devoid of honor, regarded as an impotent man (*klība*). But Indra, the father of Arjuna, softened the curse and promised Arjuna that he would spend only a year as a dancer and then would be a man again. Years later, when it was time for Arjuna and his brothers to go into exile in disguise, Arjuna put on woman's clothing (though he failed to disguise his hairy, brawny arms) and told his brothers: "I will be a *klība*." He offered his services as a dancing master to the women in the harem of a king. The king was suspicious at first, remarking that Arjuna certainly did not look like a *klība*, but he then ascertained that "her" lack of manhood was indeed firm and so let "her" teach his daughters to dance.[24]

Urvaśī here plays the role of the seductive mother, the spurned, vengeful, and incestuous goddess who punishes her unwilling son. Urvaśī is not literally Arjuna's mother, but she is a female ancestor, the mother of Bharata, the eponymous founder of the Bhāratas, Arjuna's line. Arjuna's response to Urvaśī's threats is to disguise his manhood twice over: he pretends to be a *klība* pretending to be a transvestite. Since the king determines that he lacks manhood (more precisely, in a double entendre, that he has a firm lack of manhood), his disguise must mean here something more physiological than mere transvestism. But what?

This is a paper-thin masquerade meant to be funny, because we all know how virile he is; Arjuna is, in effect, mimicking a drag queen. His assumed name is a phallic joke ("Big-reed," Brihannaḍā), and there are jokes about his big hairy arms; in fact, Arjuna argues that women's clothing is the only thing that will disguise the bowstring scars on both of his arms, which would otherwise reveal his identity as the world's greatest ambidextrous archer (a man who shoots with both hands, a delightful metaphor for a bisexual). Thus, in contrast with Ambā, Arjuna does no harm when he is in drag, because he never approaches any man sexually; his womanliness at most reflects some true aspect of his macho womanizing in the rest of the Epic.

Conclusion

What conclusions can we draw from this corpus of myths and from others related to them? In some texts, a male is entirely transformed into a female, with a female mentality and memory (aspects of gender rather than of sex), the situation that we might expect from the fluidity of gender; this happens to Ila in most texts (except on the Sahya mountain). Yet many texts, probably reflecting the dramatic, even grotesque, asymmetry between perceptions of people of different genders in actual life in ancient India, seem to reflect the very opposite view, a view of gender as astonishingly durable: the male merely assumes the outer form of the female, retaining his male essence, his male memory and mentality (as Ila does in the Sahya text and at the beginning of his transformation in most texts).

For example, in one Hindu myth, the soul of a yogi enters the body of a whore, and her soul enters his body; the resulting confusion is the subject of a Sanskrit farce (the *Bhagavadajjukīyam*), in which the whore thinks and acts like a yogi, and vice versa. Buddhist mythology, too, teaches that, to become a Bodhisattva, a woman must have not only the body but the mind of a man (though, since Buddhists do not affirm the existence of a soul, she can't have the *soul* of a man).

Most of the transformations in these myths are temporary: the person undergoing the transformation, willingly or as the result of a curse, ends up as s/he was at the start. But even in stories in which, during the period of the transformation, there is no memory of the original (and final) state, there is usually a memory (or, failing that, a discovery, by someone else) of the temporary transformation at the end. Here we must note a significant gender asymmetry: no matter whether a man becomes a woman, or a woman a man, through magic, the transformed person usually forgets the former gender and identity. But in both cases, there is *another man present, untransformed, who remembers,* and who therefore has power over the transformed person. For Ila, it is Budha; for Ambā, Bhīṣma.

Gender often proves remarkably tenacious. Even the Vedantic theory of illusion, which disparages the body in favor of the soul, implies that you may very well remain a male in some essential way even when you happen to take on a female body; even when memory is transformed, the male almost always reverts to his maleness in the end. It is worth noting that very few, if any, gender changes occur in reincarnation; even Ambā changes her gender only *after* she has been reborn with the same gender that she had in her previous life; and this stands in strong contrast to the frequent changes of species that take place in reincarnation, in texts like *The Laws of Manu.* Thus a man might more easily be reborn as an ant (presumably a male ant) than as a woman.

The two contrasting views of the persistence of gender may be correlated with two contrasting attitudes to women and to homosexual acts: the texts that view gender as fluid generally depict the transformed male as happy in her female form, while those in which the gendered memory lags stubbornly behind depict him as miserable in her female form. Freudians see latent homosexual impulses lurking under the covers even of ostensibly heterosexual acts like cuckolding, which mask a sexual attraction between the man who seduces another man's wife and the man whom he cuckolds. According to this interpretation, a cuckolder is a man who wants to get at another man through his sexual partner; the Hindus speak of weakening a

man by destroying the shield constituted by his wife's chastity, rather like the shield that Śikhaṇḍin became for the Pāṇḍava brothers. The cuckolder takes the indirect route via the woman, who may be regarded as the facilitator in a transaction between two men. Whenever one man cuckolds another, there is a duel between two phalluses. This is hardly a homosexual act in the strict sense of the word, but it does depict a world in which the sexual tension, if not the desire, is between members of the same sex—or, indeed, within a single person at war with his or her changing self. Robert P. Goldman has seen this scenario at work in certain myths of the transsexual transformation of a man into a woman, which "takes place as the consequence of a desire to avoid or defuse a potential sexual liaison with a prohibited female seen as the property of a powerful and revered male and/or the desire to be passively enjoyed sexually by such a male."[25] The repression of a homosexual impulse may account for the violence in so many of these myths: some, such as the stories of cuckolding, may be motivated not only by lust, but also by hatred and the desire for revenge.

Aspects of these myths may express positive homosexual fantasies that until now only psychoanalysts have read in (or into) more realistic stories. Parts of the psychoanalytic hypothesis are substantiated by several different sorts of myths: realistic stories in which men dress as women to seduce other men (like Bhīma—with Kīcaka—in the *Mahābhārata*);[26] fantastic stories in which men become magically doubled and the homosexual fantasy is enacted in a conveniently simplified form by eliminating the woman (indeed, any separate partner) altogether (such as the prince who married his own left half);[27] and magical stories in which the fantasy is actually acted out by a man who transforms himself into a woman and consummates the heterosexual act with the man (Viṣṇu as Mohinī).[28] The most direct variant is also by far the most rare: stories in which men or women, untransformed and undisguised, actually do consummate a homosexual act.[29]

On a repressed level, available to a hermeneutics of suspicion, there is a great deal of masked homosexual desire in these myths of transsexuality and narcissism. The homosexual themes in traditional myths are seldom overt because such myths almost always have, as a latent agenda, the biological and spiritual survival of a particular race, in both senses of the word: race as contest and as species ("us against them"). Such myths regard homosexual acts as potentially subversive of this agenda (or, at the very least, irrelevant to it, perhaps not part of the problem, but certainly no part of the solution). The ascetic aspects of Hinduism create a violent dichotomy between heterosexual marriage, in which sexuality is tolerated for the sake of children, and the renunciative priesthood, in which asceticism is idealized and sexuality entirely rejected, or at least recycled. In this taxonomy, homosexual love represents what Mary Douglas has taught us to recognize as a major category error, something that doen't fit into any existing conceptual cubbyhole, "matter out of place"—in a word, dirt.[30] Traditional Hindu mythology regards homosexual union not, like heterosexual marriage, as a compromise between two goals in tension (procreation and asceticism), but as a mutually polluting combination of the worst of both worlds (sterility and lust). The myths therefore seldom explicitly depict homosexual acts at all, let alone sympathetically.

These are not generally happy stories, or charters for the affirmation of a polymorphous, Jungian androgyny, but a homophobic Freudian analysis is of only limited

relevance. All sexual acts, homosexual or heterosexual, are regarded with a jaundiced eye by mainstream Hindu mythology. The Hindu boundaries of identity are fluid; acts of eating and sex further blur those boundaries by transgressing the limits of the human body. This is surely one of the factors contributing to the great danger that is felt, in India, to accompany the sexual act (and, indeed, eating): if you are not sure where your body ends, you will be very uneasy about exposing it to intimate contact with someone else's body. This anxiety hedges the openings of the body (Manu tells us to clean them obsessively), the things that fall off the body (nails, hair, mucous, and, of course, semen), and, ultimately, sexual intercourse. This bias is revealed not just in myths that depict sadistic sexual acts or lethal love; it is regarded as a part of natural, everyday sex. The "sweet death" or "little death" of the orgasm or the romantic *Liebestod* becomes a bitter, full-sized, and most real death in many of these stories. Some Hindu texts perceive sex as so dangerous that they attempt to eliminate the woman, to eliminate the other, to produce the only truly safe sex—when you are alone, a serial androgyne who becomes his own partner.

Not all of the homosexual desire in these myths is depicted as perverse or destructive. Nor should we be too quick to see homosexual desire as an inevitable component of the myths of sex change. Often the change is effected in the service of heterosexuality and, occasionally, in the service of a kind of androgyny or bisexuality. Some of these myths may be read as tales about bisexual desire rather than homosexual desire *tout court*. Some of them, however homophobic, challenge our own ideas about gender; they tell us that the desire for sexual pleasure both with and as members of both sexes is real, though ultimately unrealizable by all but the magically gifted—or cursed. Some of them may express a wish for androgyny and offer, in subversion of the dominant homophobic paradigm, closeted images of a happily expressed and satisfied bisexual desire. The episode of Arjuna as the dancing master epitomizes this playful, relaxed attitude toward gender boundary jumping, in vivid contrast with the anxious, often ugly, stories about sexual transformation.

Some of these stories are also about empathy: what is it like to be the other? True, empathy can be used as a weapon: "Which way was the sex better?" they asked Bhaṅgāśvana, and answer came there, "As a woman." But often the transformed characters become far more sympathetic to the other that they have experienced. It would certainly be simplistic to overlook the misogynist implications of the argument that women enjoy sex more than men do, but these texts do tell us that sexual pleasure is a serious goal for both sexes: it influences the preference for one set of children over another, which is certainly significant. Moreover, they remind us of two truths in tension, a paradox: one Hindu view of gender makes it as easy to slough off as a pair of pants (or a dress), but this view is often challenged by myths in which skin is more than skin deep, in which the soul and the memory, too, are gendered, an intrinsic part of the mortal coil that is not quite so easily shuffled off.

Notes

1. O'Flaherty 1984, 81–89.
2. Goldman 1993.
3. Shulman 1991.

4. *Mahābhārata* 1.70.16. 33–69.
5. See Doniger 1999 and forthcoming.
6. *Rāmāyaṇa* 7.87–90.
7. Doniger 1999 and forthcoming.
8. The Laws of Manu 3.34.
9. *Brahma Purāṇa* 108.26–30. 1954.
10. *Mahābhārata* 13.12.1–49; O'Flaherty 1981, 305–6.
11. *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 109.33.
12. *Dhammatthakathā* 3.9, on *Dhammapāda* 43, cited by Goldman 1993.
13. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9.1.18–42; *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.12.1–35; *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.65. 19–20; O'Flaherty 1973, pp. 304–5.
14. *Śivālaya Māhātmya* of the Sahyādrikhaṇḍa of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, chs. 3–9. I have rephrased and retranslated, working from Micaela Soar's text.
15. *Kathāsaritsāgara* 89 [12.15].
16. *Rāmāyaṇa* 7.37.28–44, 57; excised verses.
17. Nanda 1990.
18. *Mahābhārata* 5.193.60–65.
19. *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.14.11.
20. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Devī Māhātmya.
21. Nanda 1990, 13.
22. Cohen 1994, 3.
23. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 13.2.9.6–9; O'Flaherty 1995, 17.
24. *Mahābhārata* 3, appendix 1.6.36–162; then 4.2.20 and 4.10; O'Flaherty 1981, 298.
25. Goldman 1993, 391.
26. *Mahābhārata* 4.21.1–67.
27. Doniger 1999 and forthcoming.
28. Doniger 1999 and forthcoming.
29. *Padma Purāṇa*, *Svarga Khaṇḍa* 16.6–24; O'Flaherty 1990, 98–100.
30. Douglas 1966.

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GUY G. STROUMSA

Madness and Divinization in Early Christian Monasticism

The most radical forms of self-transformation involve leaving human nature altogether. This can be done either from the bottom or from the top: one can become either a beast or an angel. Pascal, who knew something about the *coincidentia oppositorum*, warned us long ago, "Qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête." In the following pages, I shall argue that in religious history, these two forms of self-transformation have not always been diametrically opposed to one another. Some examples might even suggest that one should appear to be a beast in order to become an angel.

My argument will focus on the"Fools for Christ's sake," the *saloi* saints of late antiquity, and in particular on the most famous among them, Symeon, the Holy Fool from sixth-century Emesa.[1] These odd figures, both male and female, whose behavior was meant to shock, all came from the monastic milieux in Egypt and Palestine. Extravagant behavior within ecstatic or charismatic movements is, of course, well known in the ancient world. The frenzy of the Bacchic maenads comes immediately to mind. Ecstasy, or trance, on the part of religious virtuosi is also a well-known phenomenon.[2] Israelite prophecy is here a classic example, with its connections with madness: "for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet" *(le-khol ish meshuga' u-mitnabe)*, says Jeremiah (29:26), while Hosea (9:7) refers to "the prophet [who] is a fool, the spiritual man [who] is mad" *(ewil ha-navi, meshuga' ish ha-ruah)*. Beyond such phenomena as prophecy and madness, so very different in their motivation and yet sometimes quite similar in expression, other specialists of the spiritual world, such as magicians or shamans, could appear to the outsider as set in radical contradistinction to "normal" behavior. Plato, for instance, sets Socrates' wisdom in opposition to human wisdom.[3]

The radical behavior of the religious virtuoso permits him closer contact with divinity and ultimately makes his divinization possible. As is well known, the intellectual roots of the idea of human transformation into the divine are to be found in the Platonic tradition.[4] They had been transplanted into the biblical monotheist climate by Philo, who can be said to be the true father of Christian mysticism. For

him, the ecstatic experience of the prophet represents the entering of the Divine Spirit into the soul and the latter's seizure by a kind of *sobria ebrietas*. In his words:

> But when it comes to its setting, naturally ecstasy and divine possession and madness fall upon us. For when the light of God shines, the human light sets; when the divine light sets, the human dawns and rises. . . . Mortal and immortal may not share the same home. And therefore the setting of reason and the darkness which surrounds it produce ecstasy and inspired frenzy *(ekstasin kai theophorèton manian)*.[5]

To some extent, the paradoxical experience of the *salos* saint should be seen within this complex tradition of religious eccentricity and charismatic leadership in ancient societies. The phenomenon of the *salos* has indeed been compared to other forms of liminal behavior in antiquity. Recently, in particular, Derek Krueger has argued for what one could call Cynic proclivities in the behavior of the *salos*.[6] The differences between Cynics and *saloi*, however, are obvious, and as we shall see, the Christian background is essential for a better understanding of the puzzling phenomenon of the Fools for Christ's sake. The case of the *salos* should, in fact, highlight the Christian transformation of self-transformation in late antiquity.

The *Salos*

The Christian holy man who plays the fool and shows shocking social behavior does so not only "pour épater les bourgeois," but also as a paradoxical device for getting closer to God. This pattern is mainly found in the Eastern tradition. While the first instances come from fourth-century Egyptian monasticism, the *Fortleben* of the phenomenon spans from early Byzantium to modern Russia.[7] Actually, it is probably thanks to Dostoievsky and other Russian novelists of the nineteenth century that the Fools for Christ's sake have attained a certain notoriety in Western consciousness. The figure of the "mystical vagrant saint" reached Pravoslavian Christianity from Byzantium. In the fourteenth century, in particular, the Hesychast movement offers a series of impressive figures of such saints, on the margins of society and of sane behavior.[8] In Byzantine literature, however, the original models are the most powerful ones. Symeon is the last vagrant, and later hagiographies, such as that of the ninth-century *salos* Andrew, reflect a taming, as it were, of the original model.[9] A similar decline may be observed on the Russian scene, too, where the *yurodivi* movement, which had its heyday in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was in decline in the seventeenth century.

As is well known, there are relatively few Western examples of Fools for Christ's sake, who appear there as *joculatores domini*, showing off a *laetitia spiritualis*. The most famous example among them is probably Saint Francis of Assisi, a case sui generis, and also one of the clearest Christlike figures in medieval history. Mention should also be made of a special case, the seventeenth-century Jesuit and mystic Joseph-Marie Surin, who, however, after having confronted an epidemic of frenzy in a nuns' convent, seems to have gone really mad, rather than simply *playing* the madman.[10]

Although religious frenzy was far from unknown in the ancient world, in the Christian context it would come to exhibit rather distinctive features. Such features stem, first of all, from some New Testament texts. The radical rejection of the ways

of the world, the almost antinomian setting of worldly wisdom in opposition to divine wisdom, would never be expressed in terms stronger than those of Paul:

> For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? . . . Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (I Cor. 1: 19–26)

In Paul's new scale of values, what was wisdom in the eyes of man has become folly, while what is God's wisdom *(sophia tou theou)* looks like folly *(môria)* to men. "We are fools for the sake of Christ *(hemeis môroi dia Christou)*, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute" (I Cor. 4:10).[11] One should perhaps note here that *ekstasis* can simply mean "madness" in both Patristic and classical Greek.[12]

From late antiquity on, Christian ascetics knew Paul's powerful words by heart. Metaphorically, they would first strengthen the demand of humility: no one should claim his own wisdom. In Augustine's words, "If when calling yourself wise, you become a fool, call yourself a fool, and you will become wise."[13] More precisely, Paul's words could justify a more radical opposition to the ways of the world, as in Basil of Caesarea's *Great Rule*: "How can one become a fool to this world?"[14] Moreover, these words could also be perceived as an injunction for such a behavior. Paul's passage about divine wisdom appearing to be foolishness (or folly) to outsiders, however, is not in itself enough to explain the shocking behavior of the *salos*. For such an explanation, we must turn to an analysis of the Fools' behavior, starting from its first occurrences.

The term *salos* itself is late, and quite rare, appearing almost only in monastic literature. For some time, it was believed to stem from the Syriac *sakla*, stupid, but this rather far-fetched etymology should be abandoned, as both Antoine Guillaumont and Sebastian Brock have convincingly argued.[15] The term's probable origin is popular. It usually means "imbecile," "half-witted," and is attested only once in reference to mad animals rather than men.[16]

The early cases of "Fools for Christ's sake," which stem from fourth-century Egyptian monasticism, are rather well known, and a brief review of the main examples will suffice here. The *Apophtegmata Patrum* tell us that Abba Ammonas had spent fourteen years at Scete, seeking through constant prayer to master anger and to succeed in getting rid of his own will and thoughts, "for the sake of God." When some people asked him to arbitrate between them, he played the fool. One woman said to her neighbor: "This monk (or 'old man' [*geron*]) is mad." To which he answered: "How much did I suffer in the desert in order to acquire this madness, and because of you, I should lose it today!?"[17] This instance shows the monk playing the fool in order not to be bothered by any kind of social responsibility. This he does so as to concentrate on his attempt to reach the mastery of passions, *apatheia*. This ideal of the Stoic sage, indeed, was present in the early monastic movement, following its adoption by Clement of Alexandria.[18]

The other fourth-century case is that of an anonymous nun from Tabennesis, as recorded by Palladius in his *Historia Lausiaca*.[19] Far from being really mad, this

nun "was feigning madness and the demon."[20] Unaware of her real state of mental health, the nuns called her *salè*, the term referring to the mentally ill.[21] As no one among the monastery's 400 nuns agreed to eat with her, she was never seen eating throughout her life and was assigned all sorts of menial tasks, in particular in the kitchen, being, as it were, "the monastery's sponge."[22] Palladius adds that she was thus accomplishing the Apostle's saying: "If someone wants to be wise among us, let him become a fool (*môros*) in this world, in order to become wise (*sophos*)." Piterum, an *anachorete* from Porphyrite, having heard from an angel about the holy woman, came to look for her. She was eventually brought to him from the kitchen, in her rags. As he asked her to bless him, the nuns exclaimed that she was a *salè*. "It is you who are mad," answers the holy man. "She is our *amma* (i.e., spiritual mother), mine as well as yours!" The nuns eventually ask the saintly woman to forgive them all their insults and misbehavior in the past, but after a few days, she disappears forever, unable to bear their esteem and honor.

The *salè*'s story adds some new traits to the portrait of the Fool for Christ's sake. First, it can be a woman as well as a man.[23] Although this is the only case of a *salè* in Antiquity, there are various instances of female Fools for Christ's sake in the Russian context. Second, the very existence of the *salos* emphasizes the fact that the real fools are those who despise him (or her). Third, this behavior can happen within a monastic community. Fourth, it can reflect the attitude of a lifetime. The revelation of his or her secret identity literally kills the saint, who cannot survive the public recognition of his or her holiness. In a sense, then (but only in a sense), the *salos* is the exact opposite of the stylite saint of late antique Syria, whose very life on the top of his pillar is a constant proclamation, as loud as a drumroll, of his sanctity and his powers as a charismatic virtuoso.[24]

The ideal of the *salos*, for which our earliest evidence comes from Egypt, soon reached Palestine, together with the Egyptian influence upon Palestinian monasticism. Toward the end of the fourth century or at the beginning of the fifth century, a certain Sylvanos, who had spent years in Egypt and on Mount Sinai, established a monastery in a village near Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin), a rather significant place in Palestinian Christianity, approximately halfway between Jerusalem and Gaza.[25] One of the brethren in the monastery, playing the fool,[26] would spend his days counting the stones by the river near the village (the text probably means the *wadi*, or usually dry riverbed), and putting them in two bags, one for his good and one for his evil thoughts.[27] Once the *salos* ideal reached the Holy Land, it would thrive among the monks of the Judean wilderness.

The excellent ecclesiastical historian Evagrius Scholasticus, whose *floruit* is in the last decades of the sixth century, has left us a precious description of life in the Palestinian lavras established around Jerusalem by Empress Eudocia.[28] Two main kinds of monastic life can be found there, says Evagrius. Some of the monks live as if in herds, having no earthly links whatsoever; even their clothes do not belong to them, and they circulate among the monks.[29] They eat together, but just enough to survive, and fast for long periods, so that they look like walking skeletons. Other monks "follow the opposite way," adds Evagrius, by living alone in their small caves.

Besides these two kinds of monks, says Evagrius, a third kind of monk, both men and women, has "invented a kind of life (*politeia*) which goes beyond anything

else in terms of courage and endurance." They wander in the desert almost naked, hiding only their genitals, in winter as well as during the summer. These have become companions to the beasts and are called *boskoi*, that is, grass eaters. Like beasts, they eat only whatever they can find in the desert, so that eventually they really become animals. They lose both human form and human feelings, fleeing whenever one tries to approach them.

To the smallest but most impressive group of monks, adds Evagrius, belong those who, having reached impassivity (*apatheia*), return to the world, pretending to be mad (*paraphorous*). These behave without shame; they eat anything they find, even walk into the women's baths and stay there naked with them, having so well mastered their passion that they do so without experiencing any sexual arousal. Evagrius explains this puzzling lack of normal sexuality when he adds that they are men when with men and women when with women, since they wish to participate in the nature of both sexes. In a word, such an excellent and theophoric *politeia* has its own laws, which go against those of nature. These athletes without a body, as it were, lead a double life, as they also bring remedies to the bodies of those who live in the flesh.

To the best of my knowledge, this striking and important passage, which has no real parallel in monastic literature, has not yet attracted the attention it deserves. It strikes me as describing, in so many words, the liminal search for androgyny among the monks. This is what Evagrius calls the theophoric character of their behavior, a behavior that involves crossing the boundary between human and divine nature. Having completely mastered their passions and overcome their gender, these monks have in fact become angels, not beasts. They are now divine creatures, having returned to Adam's androgyny before the fall, an androgyny described in different traditions, such as the Gnostic *Apocalypse of Adam* or *Genesis Rabba*, a Midrashic text edited in fifth-century Palestine.

The *Life of Abba Daniel of Skete*, a text from the fifth century, offers another example of a *salos*—Mark, who flourished before Symeon of Emesa.[30] Mark lived in Alexandria, together with other *saloi* (i.e., with real madmen) who survived by stealing at the market. When described as a madman, he answered: "It is you who are mad (*saloi*)!" Here again, the saint masquerading as a *salos* functions as a revealer of common madness, and of the inhuman character of common life. Only his shocking behavior can bring people to realize their own distance from both human dignity and God's presence, and only a shock can induce them to repent and convert. In this text, for the first time, repentance for past sins is presented as the reason for his strange behavior.

We know of other instances of *saloi* in the sixth and early seventh centuries. John of Amida (Diarbékyr) plays the clown. Priscus Vitalius, a poor stranger, is surrounded by fire and is happy in the city where he lives precisely because people leave in peace someone they consider to be mad. Another *salos*, Vitalios, lives at the convent of Abba Seridon, near Gaza.[31]

Another instance of an Alexandrian *salos* is found in John Moschus's *Spiritual Meadow*, a good witness to monasticism in the early seventh century (particularly in Judea). In the Alexandrian church of Theodosius, John and his friend Sophronius meet a bald man who wears a sack (*phalakros*) to his knees and appears to be *salos*.

As they give him some money, he accepts it without a word, then, turning around, throws his right hand, with the money, toward heaven, prostrates in front of God, deposits the money on the earth, and leaves. John Moschus does not offer any comment on this story, which obviously presents the apparently strange, irrational behavior of the *salos* as a clear sign of his holiness.[32]

Symeon

Evagrius Scholasticus is our first witness for Symeon of Emesa (today Homs), who lived in Syria and Palestine in the sixth century. Evagrius tells us quite simply that Symeon was playing the fool in the agora, but that with his close friends he did not act anymore.[33] Stressing the chasm between Symeon's private and public attitudes, Evagrius also mentions that Symeon usually lived in complete isolation, so that no one knew how he prayed or what he ate. Our hero, then, is the ultimate actor, a secret saint who, in a radical Christian transformation of Greco-Roman theater, plays the role of the villain. Christians deeply mistrusted and disliked the stage. But in this new kind of tragicomedy, Symeon takes the theater to the street. His name is linked, in particular, to sexual scandals. In one case, a pregnant servant accuses him of having fathered her child, and she retracts the accusation only at the time of her delivery, as Symeon prevents her from giving birth until she reveals the name of the true father. Another story finds Symeon staying, for quite a long time, in a prostitute's booth. As suspicion grows, she is brought to the tribunal, where she swears that he had come only to feed her, since she had no money to buy food. Note that in both cases, Symeon does not really sin and break ethical or religious norms. The suspicion and accusations that his nonconformist behavior attracts are thus baseless.

It is thanks to the *Life of Symeon the Fool*, written in the seventh century by Leontius, bishop of Neapolis (today Limassol), that Symeon remains the most famous of all the "Fools for Christ's sake." This hagiography also ensured the "rehabilitation" by ecclesiastical authority of that liminal and potentially dangerous character. Through early Syriac, Arabic, and Georgian translations, Leontius's *Life* soon achieved wide recognition in the Christian Orient. This *Life* has attracted much attention in the last generation. Lennard Rydén and the late Father A. J. Festugière offered an excellent edition with commentary on the text. More recently, Derek Krueger and Vincent Déroche have published important monographs. To a great extent, a close reading of the *Life of Symeon the Fool*, which remains our major source on the figure of the Holy Fool, holds the key to a better understanding of the radical kind of self-transformation through which a saint acts like a fool.[34]

Symeon's story begins with the meeting between two young Syrian pilgrims in Justinian's Jerusalem. Their dear ones have remained at home: John, the more sophisticated of the two, has left his young bride, and Symeon, his elderly mother. Both lonely, they become friends and go together to Jericho and the Jordan River. On the way, Symeon, a guileless and innocent character, inquires (in Syriac, of course) about the monasteries in the Judean wilderness. Their dwellers are "angels of God," answers his friend, and only if we become like them will we be able to see them.[35] At the monastery of Abba Gerasimos, they meet Nikon, a remarkable man whose name alludes to his personal victory over the "demonic battalions." Nikon, indeed, teaches them to fight the devil. A dream reveals to them that both Symeon's mother

and John's bride have died. Freed from the bonds of this world, and in particular from the love of women, they are now free to stay together and become monks, that is, to don "the angelic habit," and begin a life of ascetic practices as anchorites in the desert, "absolutely homeless," and eating the little grass to be found there, becoming "grazers," or *boskoi*. Symeon, the text says, "nearly exceeded the limits of human nature" in his mortifications. In the desert, then, he crosses the boundaries of humanity on both sides, behaving at once like an angel and like a beast.

After twenty-nine years of this regimen, Symeon tells his companion: "What more benefit do we derive, brother, from passing time in this desert? But if you hear me, get up, let us depart; let us save others. For as we are, we do not benefit anyone except ourselves and have not brought anyone else to salvation." John, immediately suspecting a trick of Satan, tries to dissuade his friend and warns him of the many dangers and temptations lurking in the world at large. Symeon rejects these words of caution, saying: "I will go in the power of Christ; I will mock the world (*empaizô tôi kosmôi*)." As we shall see, this sentence offers the key to Symeon's later behavior as a *salos*. "Beware, Symeon," John keeps repeating, "be on your guard, brother, lest the delusion of worldly things corrupt the prudence of the monastic life." He lists the main dangers of the world: women and possessions. "Beware, lest you lose your compunction through laughter and your prayer through your carelessness. Beware, please, lest when your face laughs, your mind be dissolved." As is well known, compunction (*penthos*) is one of the major virtues cultivated in Byzantine and Eastern monasticism.[36] Monastic life should be a constant repentance of one's sinful nature. In such a cultural context, laughter is shocking, bearing a demonic character, as it were. Strikingly, Symeon will decide to use precisely such means in order to confront Satan's threat: he will enter the world, the lion's den, under the disguise of laughter, mocking the world, and in particular the prince of this world, Satan, who does not recognize him as his bitter enemy under his disguise as a laughing fool. Laughing ridicules the enemy, transforming him into a laughingstock, eventually disarming him.[37]

Symeon begins his new life by spending three days in prayer at the Holy Sepulchre, asking that his virtue remain hidden from now on and until his death, whether he cures possessed people, accomplishes miracles, prophesies, converts Jews, or brings prostitutes back to the path of virtuous life. It is precisely in order to remain incognito as a thaumaturge that Symeon decides to appear under the guise of an idiot. "Crazy abba!" cry the children as he walks the streets of Emesa, dragging the corpse of a dog attached to his leg. He indeed plays the fool so well (*ton salon poiei*), scandalizing the townsfolk so much, that he soon has reason to fear for his life at the Emesans' hands.

Like a stylite saint, he is an eccentric who does everything to attract attention, in the street rather than from the top of a pillar, as a godless madman, misbehaving in church, letting himself be accused as a rapist, eating meat in public when expected to show some restraint. "It was entirely as if Symeon had no body, and he paid no attention to what might be judged disgraceful conduct either by human convention or by nature."

All this he does "wishing to persuade (others) that he did this because he had lost his natural sense." He behaved as if he had no body, says Leontius; that is to say, precisely, and in paradoxical fashion, like a monk who leads a *bios angelikos* (Syriac,

hayyei de-mal'akhei). He relieves himself in the open, walks naked, enters the women's baths as if "it did not matter at all" (whence the women, of course, instantly and forcefully kick him out).

It would be a mistake to perceive this antinomian behavior as reflecting no more than a monastic version of *adiaphora*, indifferent matters in Stoic ethics. It rather expresses Symeon's total mastery of his body, his radical uprooting of the sexual instinct. When asked about this last adventure, he says: "Believe me, child, just as a piece of wood goes with other pieces of wood, this was I there. For I felt neither that I had a body nor that I had entered among bodies, but the whole of my mind was on God's work, and I did not part from Him." In other words, *unio mystica* at the sauna, or rather at the *hammam*. The complete disappearance of sexual instinct plays a major role in the description of Symeon's foolishness. He appears, of course, to behave in lewd and promiscuous fashion, while in fact nothing is further from his acts, thoughts, and feelings.

The text gives us here a twofold justification of the saint's odd behavior, which has all the appearance of antinomianism: "Some of his deeds the righteous one did out of compassion for the salvation of humans, and others he did to hide his way of life." Actually, this twofold justification reflects Symeon's clearly thought-out decision that saving people by going into the world could be achieved only incognito, or rather through hiding under the cloak of madness—precisely so as not to attract Satan's attention, not to awaken his suspicion, as the saint is fighting him in his own kingdom. Not just anyone, however, can achieve anonymity through masquerading as a fool. Such paradoxical behavior is reserved for those who have spent years in the desert and reached *apatheia*, the total insensitivity to passions (and in particular, of course, to sexual passions). In other words, only he who lives like an angel can seek to live like a beast.

There are two different, although related, aspects of Symeon's behavior as a *salos*. On the one hand, he appears to be completely devoid of human decency, as when he shows total bodily shamelessness. On the other hand, he seems to be quite out of his mind and is called a madman or an idiot by everybody, children included. To such interjections, his standard answer is: "It is you who are the idiot!" Those who consider him to be mad are themselves prisoners of material reality, unable to see truth. Symeon's "madness" also reflects his prophetic powers: one day he starts whipping the pillars, saying: "Your master says, 'Remain standing!' " as he knows a large earthquake is about to seize the city. When the earthquake comes, none of the pillars he had whipped falls. On another occasion, he goes around kissing some of the school children. To the teacher at each school, he says: "In God's name, idiot, do not thrash the children whom I kiss, for they have a long way to go." The saint alone knows that an epidemic that was coming to the city would kill these children. A somewhat similar story is found in Rabbinic literature: Rabbi Joshua ben Levi accompanies Elijah, who is the bearer of special knowledge. Elijah's behavior is perceived as odd, as its reasons remain misunderstood by everybody, including Rabbi Joshua.[38]

Symeon's behavior shocks monks as well as laymen. As ascetics from the Judean desert had come to Emesa to meet him, they were laughed at: "What do you want from him, fathers? The man is beside himself, and he abuses and jeers at all of

us, particularly monks." Eventually, when they find him "eating beans like a bear," as the text has it, they ask him to bless them, saying: "Truly we have come to see a great sage (*gnostikos*); this man has much to explain to us." To which he answers: "You have come at a bad time, and the one who sent you is an idiot." He not only eats like a bear but also gorges himself on Holy Thursday. Moreover, he "skips and dances in the middle of the whole circus." He plays, indeed, "all sorts of roles foolish and indecent" and is seen flirting with prostitutes, dancing naked and whistling with them, even being whipped by one of them. He remains undefiled throughout these ordeals, thanks to the level of purity and impassivity that he has reached.

Symeon's goal in all these actions is double: on the one hand, he intends to save souls, by both his "strange deeds" (cf. *ma'assim zarim* among the Sabbateans) and his puzzling words. On the other hand, he hopes, through his mask of *salos*, to retain the salvation of his own soul, which he has achieved by reaching *apatheia* through his ascetic endeavors during the long training in the desert of Jerusalem. For this, he must remain anonymous or, rather, keep his virtue hidden, in order to avoid corrupting respect and honor. Antoine Guillaumont has correctly recognized that this attitude of the *salos* reflects a kind of anachoresis, of separation from the world.[39]

Is it quite correct, then, to speak of Symeon's self-transformation? There are two aspects to this question. From the point of view of Symeon's folly, the answer is negative. The transformation of the *gnostikos* into a *salos* remains only a *functional* self-transformation. The former ascetic has succeeded in wearing the mask of an antinomian fool and sinner without giving up his real personality, that of a saintly ascetic. Indeed, his folly is only public. "But he behaved otherwise before the crowd," says the text, in a clear *imitatio Christi*.[40] With his close friend John, he retains his ascetic behavior, fasting and praying intensely. For his prayer and ascetic practices, he usually retires to his hiding place, about which no one but John knows. Yet he is once seen conversing with two angels at the baths. The man who saw him was a Jewish artisan, soon to be converted, together with his household. Those who believe in his miraculous power are healed (or converted), while the others he calls "idiots." "Where are you going, idiot," he once asked a mule driver, "for he always had these words in the same way on his lips." "Fool," *salos*, has become more than his choice epithet, his nickname, to the extent that people invoke for help "the God of the Fool." The various characters whom he meets, those possessed by demons, the onlookers, some thieves, a clairvoyant amulet maker, beggars, a Jewish glassblower, all call him "Fool," believing, somehow, that his folly will help him to accomplish miracles.

One day, John happens to see him praying in his cave: "And seeing him from afar stretching out his hands to heaven, he was afraid, not daring to approach the monk. For he swore that he saw balls of fire going up from him to heaven." In monastic literature, this vision of light going out of the monk's cell reflects the *unio mystica*. It is in that sense that we can speak of Symeon's self-transformation: the radical self-transformation of the saintly man into an angel—one should perhaps even say his transfiguration (*metamorphosis*). Here, it represents the acme of Symeon's life. At his death, too, the angels will be called to take part in his funeral. As two men were carrying his body silently to the plot of land reserved for foreigners,

the converted Jewish glassblower heard "psalm singing, music such as human lips could not sing, and a crowd such as human lips could not gather." The Fool might have been a total stranger among men, but the angels themselves had come down from heaven to sing for him. The former Jew buried him with his own hands. When John searched for the body of his friend, he could not find it in the grave, "for the Lord had glorified him and translated him." As had the bodies of Enoch, Mary, and Christ himself, Symeon's body had reached heaven. Like the balls of fire coming from his hut, the translation of Symeon's body is a clear sign of the saint's glorification, or, in other words, of his *theiôsis*, divinization. "Truly human in face, but God in heart," concludes Leontius: he who was called a Fool, who behaved like a beast, seemingly leaving aside both divine and natural law, had in fact become a truly Christlike figure. One could hardly imagine a more radical self-transformation, achieved by more paradoxical ways. It was only after his death that the Fool's real nature would be revealed to men by the angels (and through the Jew). This revelation is also an *apotheosis*. Incidentally, the translation of Symeon's body also functions as a final act of humility on his part: no cult will develop at his tomb.

Saloi and Gnostics

Acting like a fool, then, is not the last stage of the saint's self-transformation. The ultimate goal of the Christian holy man is to get as close as possible to God, even to become united with him, or rather with the incarnate God. The *imitatio Christi* is known, in the East, mainly as the *theiôsis*, divinization, that awaits the saint at the end of his ascetic travail. A long Patristic and monastic literary tradition deals with the mystic's ultimate goal, from Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Macarius in the fourth century to Symeon the New Theologian (died 1022).[41]

As the case of Symeon of Emesa shows, however, the *salos* may strive to appear to be a beast; but what he really seeks is to become transformed into an angel and to belong to the divine world. In a paradoxical way, then, his case too represents a kind of divinization. By his incarnation, Christ had crossed the boundaries between the divine and the human world. The *salos*, who wants to become like Christ, seeks to descend in order to climb.

"Descending in order to climb:" the phrase sounds like a translation from Hebrew, "*yerida le-tsorekh 'aliya*," a major stance in Hassidism associated with the Ba'al Shem Tov.[42] Besides the *Fortleben* of the Fool for Christ's sake in the Christian tradition, the history of religions provides some striking parallels to the phenomenon, which have not yet been studied seriously enough. The Malamatia saints in medieval Islam offer a very striking parallel.[43] Here, the direct influence of the *saloi* is quite plausible. In his important monograph, Dols points out that "the varieties of religious experience among Christian adepts were witnessed by the early Muslims in their conquered territories and, probably, in pre-Islamic Arabia."[44] Dols stresses that since "holy idiocy" was a common phenomenon in Islam, it is reasonable to assume serious Christian influences on the later and in some cases strikingly similar phenomenon.

The Hassidic movement of the late eighteenth century is certainly another movement on whose origins one should seriously consider possible Christian influ-

ences, on top of clear morphological similarities. Such influences would probably originate in Orthodox monasteries in the Carpathians, and from the milieu close to spiritual figures such as that of the Moldavian staretz Paissij Velitchkovskij. Oddly enough, this tantalizing possibility has not yet been seriously explored. Israel Ba'al Shem-Tov, the founder of the movement, is often considered to be a madman. So is Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, whom the sources present as a tormented spirit, close to madness, shaken by involuntary convulsions and behaving in odd ways, like a madman, especially on his trip to Palestine.[45] Many other stories on lesser figures of Hasidic holy men (Tsaddikim) concur with this trend.

Alexander Syrkin has published what is perhaps the most interesting phenomenological analysis of the *salos*'s religious behavior.[46] Insisting on Symeon's systematic transgression of various human and ecclesiastical precepts, Syrkin seeks to understand the fool's behavior through a comparison with three semantic levels of religious behavior in Indian religions. For him, the *salos* represents a combination of sorts between the virtue of the *sannyāsin*, who rejects the world, and the highest sanctity of the *arhant*, who strives toward the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Despite the great interest aroused by structural comparisons, however, it seems to me that it is the Christian and late antique context that holds the key to this phenomenon.

Just such a social and religious contextual reading is attempted in Teodor Bakonsky's recent monograph. Bakonsky compares the *saloi* to the holy mimes, who displayed their *parrhèsia* by playing as actors (a rather disreputable way of earning one's living, of course) at the theater.[47] Laughter is here perceived as a secondary effect of this *parrhèsia*. The *salos* is even more radical: for this Promethean character, the world is a stage, and through his acting he denounces and reveals the devil's sway over this world. But even this attempt to understand the *salos* as a late antique Christianization of traditional sacred madness remains unsatisfactory. Although Bakonsky recognizes that the birth of the *salos* coincides with that of the monastic movement, his explanation does not perceive the close connection between the behavior of the *salos* and the monastic ideal of *theiôsis*. It is here, to my mind, that one can speak meaningfully of a *coincidentia oppositorum:* it is in order to remain an angel in this world that the saint has to appear to be a beast: for him (or her), this exhibitionist kind of masquerading is, paradoxically enough, the best way to appear incognito, or rather to be taken for somebody else, and thus to hide his (or her) true identity.

According to a rather disturbing tradition, it was Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross on his shoulder and the crown of thorns upon his head, while Christ, from heaven, was laughing at the ignorance of those who did not realize what was happening.[48] This docetic story, reported by Irenaeus in the name of Basilides,[49] is repeated in the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, one of the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi.[50] Christ's chilling laughter, which resounds loudly throughout the eons, presents a particularly disturbing image of the Savior poking fun at his archenemies the archons, rulers of this world, in the great game of *Heilsgeschichte*, while remaining insensitive to the suffering of poor Simon crucified in his place. Another Gnostic text tells us, even more brutally, that Jesus, rather than being crucified, himself "came crucifying the world."[51] Such powerful metaphors strike one as close in tone to Leontius of Neapolis's remark, in his *Life of Symeon the Fool*, that

the shocking behavior of the *salos* was meant to poke fun at the world, *empaizein tôi kosmôi.*[52]

At first sight, the intellectual and religious milieux of Gnostics and *saloi* seem worlds apart. The Gnostics were radical deniers of the biblical God at a time when Christianity was still in search of its own beliefs and identity. The *saloi,* on the other hand, belong to the elite of religious virtuosi at a time when Christianity had become the official religion of the Empire. Christian virtuosi and ecstatics, however, while they certainly represented a Christian elite, remained in some ways liminal not only to Christian society but also to Christian orthodoxy, from the Montanists in the second century to the Messalians in the fourth.

And yet the *saloi,* in a sense, acted like the Gnostics when they chose to "fool the world," that is, to use the weapons of ruse against naked force in their fight with the evil archons or with their leader, the devil. In both cases, one observes radical behavior, on the verge of antinomianism: social and religious norms may, or even ought, to be transgressed. As is now well known, the Pakhomian documents found in the cardboard covers of the Nag Hammadi codices reveal a provenance from monasteries around Chenoboskion. Although a definitive explanation for this puzzling fact eludes us, it is plausible, or perhaps even probable, that some Egyptian monks were fond readers of the Gnostic texts.[53] Could it be that for such monks, the declared stance of the Gnostics as aliens in a threatening world that must be fooled and fought through ruse was perceived as a model for their own behavior?[54] After all, the monks, like the Gnostics, claim to live as foreigners in the world, from a social if not a metaphysical point of view. As Antoine Guillaumont has shown, *xeniteia,* the radical cultivation of one's sense of being a foreigner, was a major value among the early monks, in particular in Egypt.[55] Christian ascetics sought to practice asceticism abroad, far from their native soil, and they used all possible means to behave like total strangers, including eccentric or strange behavior. An analysis of the evidence might enable us to ponder the tantalizing possibility that in doing so, the monks were following a pattern set earlier by the Gnostics, who had claimed to be *allogeneis,* coming from "another seed."[56]

These phenomenological parallels between *saloi* and Gnostics are perhaps genetic connections. Masquerading in order to enter this world, Satan's realm, and to challenge him and remain unhurt is a conception developed even before the birth of monasticism. Among religious virtuosi, the *salos* is a supervirtuoso. Even in the desert, he feels the need to hide, since the desert has become a city, to use Athanasius's pregnant image in his *Vita Antonii.* Only thanks to his madness can he live in the city as if it were a desert. He travels through the world unharmed, saving men without being sullied by their impurity. Thanks to his feigned madness, he can remain in God's presence while staying in Satan's kingdom and waging war with him.

Ernst Benz has argued that the early *salos* was not a complete outsider to society but only strove to keep his distance from the active, working world, remaining aloof from social responsibilities—a hippie, as it were, or perhaps a scholar.[57] Despite its rather apologetic tone, which seeks to tame a radical phenomenon, Benz's remark points in the right direction: far from being isolated by his behavior, the *salos* stands in an active, dialectical relationship with society at large. Some similar-

ities between monks, *saloi*, and cynics have been duly pointed out.[58] There are, however, vast differences between the two types of behavior, as Déroche rightly insists. It is hard to present the cynic as a religious type, or as someone interested in interaction with society at large. Like the stylite saint, the *salos* is a magnetic pole for society, a kind of charismatic anti-leader, if I may risk this oxymoron. The *salos* is, first of all, a monk. Thanks to his ruse, he is able to come back to the world, poking fun at it, after having fled it to the desert.[59]

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was published in my book *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), chapter 13.

1. For a general overview of the Fools for Christ's sake, see for instance "Fous pour le Christ," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* vol. 5, pp. 752–770, hereafter *DS*, and Ryden 1982, 106–113. For a more recent study of the *salos*'s spirituality, see Déroche 1995.

2. For Pagan and Christian examples, see F. Pfister, "Ekstase," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 4, 944–987, hereafter *RAC*.

3. See Plato, *Apology*, 20 D–E. Cf. Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, §1. On magicians and shamans in ancient Greece, see Kingsley 1995.

4. See Louth 1981.

5. Philo, *Who Is the Heir*, 264–265 (*Lost Classical Library* 4: 418–419, hereafter *LCL*). Cf. *Special Laws*, 49 (*LCL* 8: 36–38). On Philo's mysticism, see, e.g., Winston 1996, 74–82.

6. Krueger 1996, ch. 6. For a general overview of the phenomenon, see Ivanov 1994, which I know only through F. Tinnefeld's review in *Jahrbuch für Österreiche Byzantinistik* 47 (1997), 293–295.

7. See, e.g., Nigg 1956, and Fedotov 1966, 2: 316–343.

8. See, for instance, Evdokimov 1987; Congourdeau, 1999.

9. This is noted by Grosdidier 1970, 277–328. The *Lives* of Symeon, Andrew, and Basil the Younger are sometimes copied together, for instance, in a Paris manuscript; see Déroche 1995.

10. See "Fous pour le Christ," *DS*, vol. 5, 769.

11. See Bertram, *môros, ktl.* . . , Kittel, 1967 vol. 4, 832–847.

12. See "Extase chez les Pères," *DS*, vol. 5, 2104.

13. "Si dicendo te esse sapientem stultus factus es, dic te stultum, et sapiens eris," *Sermo* 67, *Patrologia Latina* 38, 436d–437a.

14. *pôs ginetai tis tôi aiôni toutôi môros: Patrologia Graeca* 31, 1272c, hereafter *PG*.

15. Guillaumont 1979, 89–116, and Brock 1973. See also Krueger 1996, 63 n. 14.

16. See Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford 1961) s.v. *salos*. Cf. *Apophtegmata patrum*, *PG* 65, 240c.

17. *Posous kopous epoièsa en tais erèmois, hina ktèsômai tèn salotèta tautèn* . . . *Apophtegmata Patrum*, Ammonas 9; *PG* 65, 121c; Guy 1976, 36.

18. On Clement and Stoicism, see *Stromateis* 3, cf. Lilla 1971, passim.

19. Lucot 1912, 228–233. See an analysis of the case in Certeau 1982, 49–58.

20. *hupokrinomenè môrian kai daimona.*

21. *houtô gar kalousai tas paskhousas.*

22. *spongos tès monès.*

23. On the special problem of female sanctity and the need to masquerade, see Patlagean 1981. On cases of female madness in early Christianity, see Clark 1997. Oddly enough, Clark does not deal with the phenomenon of the Fools for Christ's sake.

24. See the seminal study by Brown 1982.

25. Inter alia, Eleutheropolis was also the birthplace of Epiphanius of Salamis.

26. *prospoioumenos môrian.*

27. The text was published by F. Nau in Jean Rufus, *Plérophories*, Appendice, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1911), 178–179.

28. Text in Parmentier and Bidez, translation in Festugière–Rydén 1974.

29. For possible (but indirect) Buddhist influences on early Christian monasticism, see Stroumsa 1992, 314–327, and Stroumsa 1999, chapter 16.

30. L. Clugnet, ed. (Paris 1901), ch. 7, 22–25. See also the text in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 5 (1900), 60–62.

31. *Life of John the Almsgiver.* These texts are referred to by Festugière-Rydén 1974, 24–30.

32. John Moschus, *Pratrum Spirituale* CXI, PG 87, 2976 A–B.

33. Evagrius, *Hist. Eccl.* IV.34.

34. In many ways, as Derek Krueger has shown, this *Life* (Krueger 1996) conforms to the patterns for managing the lives of holy men in late antiquity. Krueger concludes his analysis (126) by noting that Diogenes and Christ are the two prototypes for the *Life of Symeon.*

35. On the monk as an angel in this world, see Brock 1973.

36. See Hausherr 1982.

37. See Bakonsky 1996 and Gilhus 1997.

38. See Bacher 1892, vol. 1, 187–194.

39. See Guillaumont 1996, 125–126.

40. Evagrius, *Hist. Eccl.* IV. 34.

41. See especially Krivochéine 1987. On divinization in Patristic thought, see, for instance, "divinisation," *DS*, vol. 3, pp. 1370–1397.

42. See Scholem 1971, p. 219.

43. See Déroche 1995 and especially Dols 1992, 366ff.

44. Dols 1992, 374.

45. See, for instance, Cunz 1997, passim. I wish to thank Jean Baumgarten for this and other references.

46. Syrkin 1982, 150–171.

47. Bakonsky 1996.

48. Cf. the important theme of the biblical prophets, the archons' vassals, as "laughingstocks" in the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth, Cairoensis Gnosticus* VII, 62–63.

49. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.24.4.

50. *Cairoensis Gnosticus* VII, 55.9–56.19.

51. *Gos. Phil., Cairoensis Gnosticus* II, 63:24. See Dart 1988, pp. 93–101.

52. I use the edition of L. Rydén, in Festugière–Rydén 1974. I quote the English translation of Krueger 1996, published as an appendix to his book. The characterization of Leontius's *Life of Symeon the Fool* as a highly puzzling text is that of the Bollandist H. Delehaye (quoted by Krueger 1996, 1, n. 1).

53. See, e.g., Stroumsa 1992, 145–162.

54. A similar use of ruse as a legitimate religious behavior is also found in later movements, in what might reflect a Gnostic influence. In Shi'ite Islam, in particular, it became known as *taqqiyya*; as for the Gnostics, lying becomes justified in the face of religious persecution.

55. Guillaumont 1979, 89–116.

56. See, for instance, Stroumsa 1984, passim.

57. Hebrew *batlan* (cf. Greek *scholè*); as the Mishna states, any city, in order to justify its name, needs the presence of at least ten *batlanim:* scholars? *saloi?*

58. By both Krueger 1996 and Guillaumont 1979.

59. Abba Or, fourth-century Nitria, *Apoph. Patrum,* Or 14, *PG* 65, 440c.

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II

THE SELF POSSESSED

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CRISTIANO GROTTANELLI

Possessed Transsexuals in Antiquity

A Double Transformation

Some Introductory Remarks

In preparing this essay, I started out with two hypotheses that I tested and found to be wrong. The first was that the idea of feigned possession, and of the resulting false prophecy, that was so striking in Apuleius's novel *Metamorphoseon Libri XI* or *Asinus aureus*, was a typical aspect of Hellenistic and Roman imperial philosophical and theological reflection. The second was that the other transformation attributed to the ancient votaries of Oriental goddesses by Greek and Latin texts—that is, transsexual behavior, often including emasculation—was connected both to their addiction to possession trance and to their connection with female deities—in other words, that the votaries were effeminate males because they were believed to be possessed by female deities.

I should have realized that my hypothetical assumptions were not sound. Regarding my first hypothesis, I should have paid more attention to anthropological discussions on possession trance, and especially to the work of Michel Leiris, who insisted on the "theatrical aspects of possession."[1] Indeed, Leiris had shown in 1958 that the female specialists of the Ethiopian *zar* cult systematically accused their rivals of faking possession; at least in that case, such an accusation, far from being the sign of a crisis of the ideology of possession, was an integrated part of that ideology.[2] As for my second hypothesis, I should have considered that the connections between possession and transsexual transformation are extremely widespread, both in time and space, and in most cases are not combined with the cult of female-possessing agents.[3] More specifically, though the identity of such agents is often discussed by my sources, the discussion is often too complex to include a simple equation between the agent and a specific deity, and no ancient text states explicitly that the votaries were possessed by the goddess.

Possession, Self-inflicted Wounds, and Self-castration

Between the first and the second centuries of the common era, two different transformations were discussed in connection with the devotees of the Phrygian, or the Syrian, goddess, sometimes called *galloi* in Greek and *galli* in Latin.[4] The first of these transformations, which often includes self-castration, is described by some sources as turning the *gall(o)i* into females, and by other sources as merely depriving them of their virility and turning them into *semiuiri*. While this transformation is presented as permanent, the other transformation, a fit of divine frenzy interpreted as possession, was temporary by definition; but, just like the permanent change, it was envisaged as brought about by the *gall(o)i* themselves by various means, mainly music and dance. The ancient sources combine the two transformations in very different ways. I shall examine these sources in the following pages, giving special attention to possession (see table 6.1 to 6.3).

Apuleius of Madaura's novel *Metamorphoses* or *Asinus aureus* was probably written shortly after 169 C.E. The story's hero, Lucius, is interested in magical transformations and ends up being turned into an ass. He is sold to many different masters in succession, and toward the end of the novel, he is bought by a band of wandering *cinaedi* of the Phrygian goddess, headed by an old effeminate rascal, Philebus. In book 8 of the Latin novel (table 6.1—Apuleius), Philebus and his followers dress up and dance, going from one country house to another and collecting money and other gifts from spectators. When they reach a rich villa (*ad quandam uillam possessoris beati perueniunt*),

> with arms bared to the shoulders and brandishing frightful swords and axes, they chanted and danced, excited by the frenzied beat of the flute music. . . . They frantically flung themselves forward, filling the place with the sound of their discordant shrieks. For a long time they dropped their heads and rotated their necks in writhing motions, swinging their hanging locks in a circle. Sometimes they bit their own flesh with their teeth, and finally they all began slashing their arms with the two-edged blades they were carrying. In the midst of all this one of them started to rave more wildly than the rest, and producing rapid gasps from deep down his chest, as though he had been filled with the heavenly spirit of some deity, he simulated a fit of madness—as if indeed the god's presence was not supposed to make men better than themselves, but rather weak and sick. Now see what sort of reward he earned from divine providence. Shouting like a prophet, he began to attack and accuse himself with a fabricated lie about how he had perpetrated some sin against the laws of holy religion(; and he went on to punish himself with a whip, so that the ground) grew wet with the filthy, effeminate blood from all this slashing of swords and lashing of whips. I was struck with considerable alarm when I saw this generous profusion of gore from so many wounds. I was afraid that by some chance the foreign goddess's stomach might get a yearning for ass's blood, as some humans' stomach yearned for ass's milk.

The main outline and many details of Apuleius's *Metamorphoseon Libri* correspond precisely to those of a shorter and earlier Greek novel known as *Loukios* or *The Ass* and attributed by many to Lucian of Samosata (ca. 115 C.E.-after 180 C.E.). It is impossible to decide whether the Latin novel I have quoted from so far is a greatly expanded

version of the Greek *Ass* narrative we possess or the translation of another, longer Greek *Ass* narrative that is now lost.[5] But the episode featuring the *galloi* that is found in the novel attributed to Lucian (table 6.1—Loukios) is shorter than the corresponding one in Apuleius's text and does not mention possession—true or faked.

So Apuleius associates the dances of his *cinaedi* with a faked possession, while the author of the Greek novel presents such dances merely as spectacular behavior rewarded by alms. The Greek treatise on the Syrian goddess of Hierapolis (*De Dea Syra*), also attributed by some scholars to Lucian of Samosata, adopts a third position (table 6.1—*De Dea Syra*), and explains self-castration itself as a consequence of holy frenzy caused by music and dance:

> Upon feast days, a multitude assembles in the sanctuary (of the Syrian goddess in Hierapolis) and many *galloi* and [other] holy men celebrate rituals, cut their own forearms and hit each other on their backs, while many others who are present play flutes, beat upon drums and sing their divine and sacred songs. All this is done outside the temple, and those who perform these ritual acts do not enter the building. It is on such holy days that men castrate themselves and become *galloi*. For while this crowd plays musical instruments and performs rituals, many are overtaken by madness (*manie*), and some who just came to see the ritual performances are also subjected to the same fits of fury, and behave like the others. I shall now describe what they do. The young man who is thus overtaken tears off his clothes, comes to the center of the sanctuary and takes up a sword. In my opinion, he has been prepared for this over many years. Having thus taken up the sword, he emasculates himself, and runs through the city holding in his hand the genitals he has just cut off. From the house in which he throws what he has ripped away from his body, he receives a woman's garment and paraphernalia.

Now that I have presented my first texts, I shall look more closely at each of them in order to explore the ways in which the two transformations are presented. I shall begin with transsexuality. Apuleius describes Philebus as a *cinaedum et senem cinaedum* (a pervert and an old one at that) and calls the wandering *popularium faeces "semiuiri,"* who are shown to be addicted to passive homosexual practice and addressed as *puellae* ("girls") by Philebus. Objectively, these are thus half-males and characterized by sexual inversion; subjectively, they are females. The *Ass* novel attributed to Lucian simply presents a slightly shorter version of the same description: *kinaidos gar kai geron* corresponds to *cinaedum et senem cinaedum*, and the devotees are called "girlies," *korasia*, by Philebus. But his words are more, not less, than the words attributed to the corresponding figure in the longer Latin novel: he hopes his newly bought donkey will be an asset to the *korasia*, so that they breed foals like the father. In this text, sexual change and perverted sex ironically imply that the "girlies" may even become mothers.

As for the treatise *De Dea Syra*, we have seen the newly emasculated *gallos* donning a woman's clothes; but in another part of that text this custom is explained as pointing not to a total change of gender, but to the very sexual ambiguity of the eunuch devotees. This transsexual disguise was, however, deep enough to involve the undertaking of feminine tasks (*De Dea Syra* 27).[6]

As for the second transformation, possession, it is easily detected in all the texts I have discussed so far, but it is even harder to define. Latin *furor* with the adjective

furens, and Greek *manie*, are found in all texts: though they cover wider semantic fields, in the specific contexts formed by the music, song, and frenzied dancing attributed to the goddesses' devotees, they amount to technical terms, indicating what we would describe in modern terms as possession trance. In line with the Platonic theory of *manie*, these terms imply a special connection with some deity and may refer to some type of divination. All texts identify them as typical transformations undergone by the devotees, and three texts connect them with self-inflicted wounds. Yet only one text tells us how this trance worked and how the deities were supposed to be involved in it. This text is Apuleius's novel (8.27), where the phenomenon is presented as a stronger Bacchic fury (*unus ex illis bacchatur effusius*), implying rapid gasps from deep in the individual's throat (*de imis precordiis anhelitus crebros referens*) and seeming to indicate that the same individual was full of the divine spirit of a deity (*numinis diuino spiritu repletus*). But even this more detailed text tells us nothing of the identity of the deity supposedly "filling" the furiously dancing devotee. All we are told is that such a state caused prophecy (*uaticinatio clamosa*) and an orgy of self-accusations and self-punishment.

In three of the texts (table 6.1—Apuleius, *Loukios e onos*, *De Dea Syra*), the effeminate votaries make music, dance, and rave; in these three texts, they hurt themselves with blades or with whips, making their own blood flow. In the treatise *De Dea Syra*, however, the self-inflicted wounds are caused by the *manie* (that is, in its turn, caused by frenzied music) and include self-castration. The treatise thus contains what I would call a circular sequence, where the other descriptions have linear sequences. In the other cases, the *kinaidoi* dance and rave; here the *galloi*, driven by music, rave and hurt themselves, while others, also driven by the same music, rave, hurt themselves, and castrate themselves, thus becoming *galloi*. So the *galloi* who are overtaken by *manie* caused by the festive music in the holy precinct had become *galloi* because, during a previous festival, they had been overtaken by *manie* in the same precinct and as an effect of the same kind of music.

In *De Dea Syra*, the *manie* caused by festive music causes the self-inflicted wounds of those who are already *galloi*, and the self-castration of others, who thus become *galloi*. In the other texts, this is not the case. Apuleius describes the *cinaedi* who hurt themselves with their teeth and then with blades *before* he discusses the possession of one of the effeminate rascals, who raved more wildly (*bacchatur effusius*); and the Greek *Ass* novel mentions the movements of the *kinaidoi* to the frenzied music made by the pipers *together* with the cutting of their forearms and tongues. In the early fourth century of the common era, the author of the treatise *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (possibly Iamblichus from Calchis in Coelesyria) envisaged such self-abuse as a sign that divine possession (*enthousiasmos kai theophoria*, referring to *orthos katechomenon hupo ton theon*) was actually taking place (table 6.1—*De Myst. Aegypt.*), in a context in which possession was discussed as an instrument for divination:

> Those who have totally submitted to the gods who blow their spirits into them (*tois epipneousi theois*), the treaty says, do not behave according to their own senses, but lose consciousness. And this is the main proof of their state: some, who are pierced by spits, do not feel any pain, nor do others feel anything, who hit their own back with hatchets; and others still, who cut their own forearms with knives, are not conscious of it. (3.108.4)

TABLE 6.1 Possession and Self-castration

	Previous self-castration	Music, song, dance	Trance	Self-inflicted wounds	"Prophetic" speech
1. Apuleius, *Metamorph. Lib.* 8.27–28		Flute music, drums, cymbals, songs, dance	A *cinaedus bacchatur effusius*, possessed	Self-inflicted wounds (with pain)	Self-accusation, self-punishment
2. Lucian, *Loukios e onos* 36–37		Flute music, turbans thrown off, heads twisted round		Self-inflicted wounds	
3. *De Dea Syra* 50–51	Previous self-castration	Flutes, drums, songs	*Manie*	Self-inflicted wounds, self-castration	
4. *De Myst. Aegypt.* 3.4			*Enthousiasmos kai theo-phoria*	Self-inflicted wounds (no pain)	
5. Tibullus, *Carm.* 1.6, 45–54		*Bellonae motu agitata*	*Amens*	Self-inflicted wounds (*non timet*)	*Canit eventus quos dea magna monet*

This idea that self-abuse is a proof of correct possession is no mere late speculation, for almost four centuries before the treaty *De Mysteriis* was written, and precisely in the year 25 or 26 B.C.E., the Latin poet Tibullus (1.6. 45–50) wrote that the prophetess of the goddess Bellona, agitated by that goddess (*motu . . . agitata*), feared neither fire nor the whip and wounded her own forearms with an axe, thus bathing the goddess in her blood, while she sang the future events the goddess ordered her to announce (table 6.1—Tibullus).

In all probability, Apuleius and the author of the Greek *Ass* novel did not envisage the bloody self-abuse of the vulgar and effeminate beggars as a supposed proof of their (feigned) possession. That behavior was probably presented by the two novels only as an aspect of the stereotyped behavior of the wandering devotees. But the *De Dea Syra* could well have included self-abuse in its description of the festive frenzy in the sacred precinct precisely as a sign of the possession that overtook both the *galloi* and the onlookers who ended up by cutting off their own genitals. This seems to be indicated by the fact that the *manie* by which the bystanders are overtaken is clearly shown to be the cause of their behavior, including self-inflicted wounds and culminating in self-castration, according to the circular sequence I have discussed. If this interpretation is the correct one, then the self-emasculation is not only *caused* by the *manie*, as I have suggested earlier, but also *made possible* by the possession, because the trance functions as an anaesthetic of sorts, in line with the description of *De Mysteriis* 3.108.4 and of Tibullus.

Faked Possession: From Apuleius to Celsus

Though the picture is simple and clear, there is an aspect of these four texts that is striking in itself and allows us an insight into the second transformation of the votaries. I refer to the fact that, while the other texts seem to adopt an uncritical position, Apuleius explicitly denies that the possession of the frenzied devotee he describes so carefully is a real possession (table 6.2). Immediately after having stated that the possession was a fake, he adds that the rascal behaved "as if the god's presence was not supposed to make humans better than themselves, but rather weak or sick" (*quasi deum praesentia soleant homines non sui fieri meliores, sed debiles effici uel aegroti*). This went beyond the mere denial that divine possession was taking place in that specific case and amounted to a more general attack on the idea that a god's presence (*deum praesentia*) could cause loss of mind (*sauciam uecordiam*). The plebeian *cinaedus*' trance could not be true because he was a mountebank, but also because the possession he was faking would have identified a divine presence with a fit of madness. According to the author of the Latin *Ass* novel, this was absurd. Apuleius was a Platonist; but in this case his attitude to possession went well beyond Plato's rationalism, for Plato had always believed in the divine quality of *manie* and in its connection with true divination.

Apuleius's idea that the eunuch simulated possession is well attested in ancient literature (see table 6.2). Shortly after 180 C.E., Lucian of Samosata, who, as I have suggested, was probably the author of a Greek *Ass* novel but not of the treatise *De Dea Syra*, wrote a witty and abrasive account of a priest of Asclepius and practicing prophet, Alexander of Abonoteichus in Paphlagonia. That account (table 6.2—Lucian) is known as *Alexander or the False Prophet* (*Alexandros e pseudomantis*) because the Paphlagonian *mantis*, who was very famous in the Oriental part of the Roman Empire, is denounced by Lucian as an impostor who was also, among other things, a passive homosexual, wore his hair long, had "falling ringlets, dressed in a party-colored tunic of white and purple, with a white coat over it," and tossed "his unconfined mane about like a devotee of the Great Mother when possessed (*hosper hoi te(i) metri ageirontes te kai entheazomenoi*)." This rascal, the son of obscure and humble parents, invented oracles and prophetic dreams and thus deceived the gullible Paphlagonians, who were all agog "whenever a man but turned up with someone at his heels to play the flute or the tambourine or the cymbals, and told fortunes" (*Alex.* 9). Lucian states that Alexander simulated trances, and the trick he played is described as follows:

> Upon invading his native land with all his pomp and circumstance after a long absence, he was a man of mark and note, affecting as he did to have occasional fits of *manie* (*memenenai prospoioumenos*) and causing his mouth to fill with foam. This he easily managed by chewing the root of soapwort, the plant that dyers use, and to his fellow-countrymen the foam seemed supernatural and awe-inspiring. (*Alex.* 12)

This picture of a holy fraud is typical of Lucian's wit, and the trick used to imitate the foaming mouth of a man in trance is well invented. But this was no novelty in Hellenistic literature; indeed, it was probably a specific version of a *topos*, as is indicated by the description of the Syrian slave Eunous, a native of Apamea, who was to become the leader of a slave rebellion in Sicily around 160 B.C.E.. This description

TABLE 6.2 Feigned Possession

	Description
1. Apuleius, *Metam.* 8.27–28	One of them (= the *cinaedi*) started to rave more wildly than the rest (*bacchatur effusius*), and producing rapid gasps from deep down in his chest as though he had been filled with the divine spirit of some deity (*uelut numinis diuino spiritu repletus*) he simulated a fit of madness (*simulabat sauciam uecordiam*)—as if, indeed, the gods' presence was not supposed to make humans better than themselves, but rather weak or sick (*prorsus quasi deum praesentia soleant homines non sui fieri meliores, sed debiles effici uel aegroti*)
2. Lucian, *Alexander* 11	He was a man of mark and note, affecting as he did to have occasional fits of madness (*memenenai prospoioumenos*) and causing his mouth to fill with foam. This he easily managed by chewing the root of soapwort, the plant that dyers use; and to his fellow-countrymen the foam seemed supernatural and awe-inspiring.
3. Diodorus Siculus, 34/35.2.5–7	(Eunous) [. . .] not only gave oracles by means of dreams, but even made a pretence of having waking visions of the gods (*theous horan hupokrineto*) and of hearing the future from their own lips [. . .] Finally, through some device (*dia tinos mechanes*), while in some state of divine possession (*meta tinou enthousiasmou*) he would produce fire and flame from his mouth, and thus rave oracularly about things to come (*kai houto ta mellonta apephoibazen*).
4. Celsus, *Alethes logos* (Origen 7.3, 9, 11)	Many (Phoenician and Palestinian obscure men) seem to toss about as if they were speaking oracles (*kinountai dethen hos thespizontes*) [. . .] These alleged prophets, after he had exposed them, admitted they were impostors and confessed they had forged meaningless utterings (*homologesan auto(i) hou tinos edeonto, kai hoti eplassonto legontes alloprosalla*).

(table 6.2—Diodorus Siculus) is found in Diodorus Siculus' *Bibl. Hist.* 34/35.2.5–9, and since Diodorus wrote his magnum opus toward the middle of the first century B.C.E., the following description of the faked possession of the Syrian slave is older than Lucian's portrait of his Paphlagonian fraud by approximately two centuries:

> (Eunous) claimed to foretell the future, by divine command, through dreams, and because of his talent along these lines deceived many. Going on from there he not only gave oracles by means of dreams, but even made pretense (*hupekrineto*) of having waking visions of the gods and of hearing the future from their own lips. . . . Finally, through some device, while in a state of divine possession (*meta tinos enthousiasmou*), he would produce fire and flame from his mouth, and thus rave oracularly about things to come (*kai houto ta mellonta apephoibazen*). For he would place fire, and fuel to maintain it, in a nut—or something similar—that was pierced on both sides; then, placing it in his mouth and blowing on it, he kindled now sparks, and now a flame. Prior to the revolt he used to say that the Syrian goddess appeared to him, saying that he should be king, and he repeated this, not only to others, but even to his own master.

Alexander's trick with the soapwort root and Eunous's trick with the fiery nut are obviously similar; and Diodorus's account ties the impostor's words to the worship of that same Syrian goddess whose devotee is described by Apuleius as feigning possession. But in the Greek historian's narrative the possession is not explicitly presented

as a fake: indeed, while the dreams, the visions, and the fiery breath attributed to Eunous are said to be false, the possession is simply quoted as "some (kind of) divine possession" (*meta tinos enthousiasmou*). So, while in general Diodorus's description resembles those of Apuleius and Lucian, the specific way in which Eunous's possession is presented is similar to the phrasing adopted by the treatise *De Dea Syra*. To find a possession presented in a way that corresponds to the attitudes of Apuleius and Lucian in his *Alexander or the False Prophet*, we have to turn to a further text.

In the same decade in which Apuleius produced his novel, another Platonist intellectual, Celsus, published his pamphlet against the Christians, probably under the title *Alethes logos*, "True Discourse." This text is lost, but we are able to reconstruct parts of it because they are quoted, probably verbatim, by the Christian Origen, who wrote his *Contra Celsum* about eighty years later, as a defense of the new religion.[7] In book 7 of the *Contra Celsum* (table 6.2—Celsus), we find the following quotation from the Platonist's pamphlet:

> (The Christians) take no notice of the oracles of the (Delphic) Pythia, of the priestesses of Dodona, of the god worshipped in Klaros, of those of the Brankhidai (in the sanctuary of Apollon Didymaios near Miletus) or of (Zeus) Ammon (in Lybia), nor do they pay any attention to the thousands of other diviners by whose counsel the whole earth has been colonized. But the ones (i.e., the predictions) pronounced, or even not pronounced, by the inhabitants of Judaea, in their own way, and following a practice that is still continued today by those who live in Phoenicia and in Palestine, they consider wonderful and unalterable [7.3]. . . . (I wish to) indicate the way in which divination is done in Phoenicia and in Palestine, because I have a complete and first-hand information on this topic. The forms of prophecy (*propheteion*) are many: but among the inhabitants of those regions the most perfect (*teleotaton*) is the following. Many totally obscure persons, with the greatest ease and on every occasion, both in sanctuaries and without sanctuaries, and others who go begging for their food and wandering through towns and encampments, start to toss about as if they were prophesying (*kinountai dethen hos thespizontes*). They utter prophetic discourse, announcing disaster and promising salvation to their followers . . . To these frightful words they add unknown, delirious and totally obscure utterances so that no reasonable person could find out what they mean: being so deprived of clarity, and indeed empty of meaning, such utterances offer any idiot or magician the possibility of making use of them for any occasion by giving them the value they prefer . . . [7.9]. Now these supposed prophets, whose voices I heard with my own ears, having been unmasked (by me), have confessed their imposture, admitting that they invented meaningless words (*omologesan hou tinos edeonto, kai hoti eplassonto legontes alloprosalla*). (7.11)

Many scholars have concentrated on the connection between this detailed description of Phoenician and Palestinian possession and prophecy and aspects of the New Testament (especially John 8:42–48)[8] or of later Gnostic texts. In the present context, I think it is more useful to compare Celsus's prophets to Apuleius's *cinaedi*, who are also said to simulate possession trance. The simulation is precisely the main category the two groups have in common: this is expressed in Latin by *simulabat* and in Greek by the verb *eplassonto*. That this imposture was in both cases a faked possession is shown by Apuleius's *uelut numinis divino spiritu repletus* and by Celsus's *Ego eimi . . . pneuma theion*, "I am a divine spirit," quoted as an opening for-

mula of the supposed prophets' discourse. Moreover, the "as if" quality of both possessions is expressed by *uelut* in Apuleius's words I have just quoted and by *hos* in Celsus's *kinountai dethen hos thespizontes*, "they start to toss about as if they were prophesying."

Of course, the two categories also differ in many ways. But the differences between the utterances and the behavior of these impostors in the Latin novel and in the contemporary Greek text is a proper reversal rather than a mere divergence: Apuleius's *cinaedus* shouts out his own guilt and punishes himself, while Celsus's "common men" put the blame on other human beings and present themselves as divine saviors. Finally, common traits may be detected even beyond the issue of simulation. The fact that some of the vulgar nobodies described by Celsus "go begging for their food and wandering through towns and encampments" corresponds not only to the behavior of early Christians from Jesus to Paul, but also to the lifestyle of plebeian *galloi*, and the verb used by that author, *ageiro*, "to collect, to beg," is referred by Lucian to the Mother's devotees and etymologically connected to the technical terms *agyrtes* and *metrargyrtes*, indicating the goddess's begging votaries. Finally, the mention, in Celsus's texts, of feigned possessions both in holy precincts and outside such precincts corresponds well to what the *De Dea Syra* and Apuleius respectively tell us about the true or supposed possession of the devotees.

Origen Defends the Biblical Prophets

After he has quoted Celsus at length, Origen dedicates some pages to a refutation of his opponent's argument. He makes several points, but three are most important. First of all, Origen denies that Celsus actually had direct knowledge of Phoenician and Palestinian would-be prophets. The description given in *Alethes logos*, he writes, is far from precise, and on the whole the picture Celsus draws does not ring true. Secondly, in Celsus's time "there were no prophets like the ancient ones," that is, like the Old Testament prophets. This means, of course, that even if Celsus's description had a grain of truth in it, it could not be applied to the ancient prophets. Indeed—and this is the third point—there are many reasons for thinking the biblical prophecies were the result of divine inspiration (*Eikos men houn einai logous . . . apodeiknunai . . . entheous tas propheteias*). Origen adds that this is precisely what he has tried to show in his commentaries to Isaiah, to Ezechiel, and to other prophetic books of the Bible, especially by concentrating on passages Celsus would have called delirious and obscure.

I have translated Origen's expression *entheous tas propheteias* as meaning that the biblical prophecies were "the result of divine inspiration." Such a translation, which avoids the idea of possession, is specifically chosen to reflect Origen's view of the prophets; and indeed the best version I know, which we owe to the Jesuit scholar Marcel Borret, renders that expression as "inspired by God *(inspirées de Dieu)*."[9] But the basic concept is consistent in all cases because, as Eric R. Dodds wrote back in 1951, "*entheos* means . . . always that the body has a god within it, as *empsychos* means that it has a *psyche* within it." As Dodds has shown, *entheos*, when referring to the Pythia in Delphi, corresponded to the Latin expression *plena deo*, and the same concept is expressed by Cicero in his treatise on divination (1. 67) with the

sentence *deus inclusus corpore humano, iam, non Cassandra, loquitur* referring to the mantic utterances of Priamus's daughter during the Trojan war.[10] In turn, this corresponds well to Apuleius's *numinis diuino spiritu repletus,* in a passage where the adverb *uelut* qualifies the possession as feigned. Apuleius, Celsus, and Origen are thus discussing true and simulated possession and inspiration: Apuleius says the vulgar *cinaedus* is merely pretending he is possessed by a deity's spirit; Celsus says the same thing about Phoenician and Palestinian nobodies; and Origen, eighty years later, declares that biblical prophets were really possessed by God.

Possession by a Bad Spirit: 1. Firmicus Maternus

It is to the new, Christian conception of possession trance that we should turn, I think, in order to understand the only ancient text known to me that identifies the spirit possessing the effeminate devotees of Oriental goddesses. The text in question (table 6.3—Firmicus Maternus) was written at least 150 years after Apuleius: it is the work of a Christian author attacking "profane," that is, "pagan" religions. In Firmicus Maternus's *De errore profanorum religionum*[11] the Assyrian and African votaries are described as follows:

> (1) The Assyrians and some Africans hold that the air is the supreme element, and venerate it as a symbolic figure. They have consecrated it by calling it Juno or the virgin Venus (insofar as Venus may be perceived as a virgin . . .). They have given that element a female identity, having been moved by I know not what strange veneration. Because of the fact that air lies between sea and sky, they render homage to it with the effeminate voice of their priests. (2) Tell me now: is it the will of a deity that requires for a man a woman's body, and that the band of priests dedicated to it may not serve it without turning their faces into feminine faces, without polishing their skins, and without shaming their male sex with female attire? Even in their temples it is possible to see such miserable shamefulness, that should be deplored with a public weeping, as the fact that men suffer the sexual treatment reserved for women and ostentatiously glorify the degradation of their impure and shameless bodies. They publicly declare their crimes (*Publicant facinora sua*) and the vice of their polluted bodies as they confess them, thus adding to them the incredible ignominy of their enjoyment. As women do, they decorate their hair and wear it long, and, dressed in delicate robes, they hardly keep their heads up with their weak necks. Then, after having thus alienated their masculinity, and intoxicated by the sound of flutes, they call upon their goddess, so that, filled by a nefarious spirit, they may predict alleged future events to gullible human beings (*adimpleti tibiarum cantu uocant deam suam, ut nefario repleti spiritu hominibus quasi futura praedicant*). What is this monstrous prodigy (*Quod hoc monstrum est quodque prodigium*)? They deny that they are men, and indeed they are not men; they want to consider themselves women, but all other details of their bodies betray the fact that they are not real women. (3) One must also consider what kind of deity theirs must be (*quale sit numen*), in order to enjoy becoming the guest of such impure bodies (*quod sic impuri corporis delectatur hospitio*), to adhere to such shameless limbs, to be placated by the polluted contamination of such frames. (4.1–3)

In the commentary appended to his translation of Maternus's pamphlet, Robert Turcan compares this description of the transsexual devotees to Apuleius's presentation of the wandering *cinaedi* in the passages I have discussed at the beginning of

TABLE 6.3 Possession by a Bad Spirit

	Description
1. Firmicus Maternus, *De err. Prof. Rel.* 4.1–2	(The Assyrian and African effeminate priests of the goddess), filled with the sound of flutes, call upon their goddess (*adimpleti tibarium cantu uocant deam suam*) in order to be possessed by a bad spirit and thus to predict supposed future events to gullible humans (*ut nefario repleti spiritus* [. . .] *quasi futura praedicant*).
2. Plutarch, *De def. Oracul.* 51	(The Pythia) went down into the oracle unwillingly, they say, and half-heartedly; and at her first responses it was at once plain [. . .] that she was not responding properly; she was like a laboring ship and filled with a mighty and bad spirit (*neos* [. . .]*alalou kai kakou pneumatos pleres*).

this chapter.[12] And indeed, the Christian author seems to have known and used the *Metamorphoseon Libri* of his predecessor; but, as Turcan also notes, the difference between the two texts is no less striking than their similarity. I shall not deal with the theological difference, nor with the fact that Maternus says nothing of the self-castration of his Oriental and African *sacerdotes*. In the present context, the diverging ways in which the possession is treated by Maternus and Apuleius are far more important. While Apuleius, as I have shown, simply denied that the raving *cinaedus* (who, we are told, *bacchatur effusius*) was possessed by a divine spirit (*numinis diuino spiritu repletus*) and told us nothing of the identity of the alleged *diuinus spiritus*, Maternus describes the sound of the flutes, the invoking of the goddess by her votaries, and finally a real possession, identified as a possession by a bad spirit (*nefario repleti spiritu*) and causing false prophecies to mock gullible humans (*uanis hominibus quasi futura praedicant*). Behind the *nefarius spiritus* mentioned by Maternus, one can detect the *pneuma akatharton* of the New Testament, and, behind that, *to pneuma to akatharton* of the Septuagint Zechariah 13–14 probably looms.[13] One should also note that, as the yahwistic *pseudoprophetai* of Zechariah 13 spoke in the name of Yahweh but were possessed by an impure spirit, thus the *sacerdotes* of *De errore profanarum religionum* invoked *deam suam* and were then possessed by a bad spirit. It is thus not explicitly the goddess, but a spirit that may not simply be identified with the deity in question, who possessed her followers, even though the *numen* who delighted in such shameless bodies (and should be judged by its predilection) is probably the goddess herself. But the identity of the spirit in question in a truly Christian perspective is probably pointed to by the sentence *Nolite corpus quod deus fecit scelerata diaboli lege damnare* addressed by Maternus to the same *sacerdotes* a few lines after the ones I am discussing. This possession is diabolical.

Possession by a Bad Spirit: 2. Plutarch

I have shown that the Greek and Latin texts featuring the effeminate followers of Phrygian and Syrian goddesses sometimes denied that the wandering devotees underwent a true possession and, in other cases, described their *manie* or their *furor* in ways that indicated a belief in the reality of such transformations but provided no substantial information on the possessing entities. Yet my discussion of the treat-

ment of possession by such texts would not be complete without an analysis of the complexities of one specific source, more reflexive than the texts I have considered so far. In his dialogue *De defectu oraculorum*, written during the late first or early second century C.E., Plutarch dealt with the prophetic possession of the Pythian priestess of Apollo in the age-old oracular shrine in Delphi (table 6.3—Plutarch). Plutarch was both an intellectual influenced by contemporary Greek philosophy and a Delphic priest; his attitude to the local form of divination strove to combine the two perspectives.[14] The text begins with a discussion of prophetic possession by Plutarch's brother Lamprias, and the common belief that the Delphic priestess is simply possessed by Apollo is then questioned:

> Certainly it is foolish and childish in the extreme to imagine that the god himself after the manner of ventriloquists (who used to be called "Eurycleis," but now "Pythones") enters into the bodies of his prophets and prompts their utterances, employing their mouths and voices as instruments (*ton theon auton hosper tous eggastrimuthous . . . enduomenon eis ta somata ton propheton hupophtheggesthai, tous ekeinon stomasi kai phonais chromenon organois*). For if he allows himself to become entangled in men's deeds, he is prodigal with his own majesty and he does not observe the dignity and greatness of his own pre-eminence.

These arguments are familiar: they are a more complete version of Apuleius's refusal to accept that a *numen* possessed the *cinaedus*, even though the Latin author's perspective centered upon the human being's transformation rather than upon the deity's "entanglement" in human needs. From this point of view Plutarch's preoccupation resembles Maternus's disgusted reaction to the idea that a *numen* could mix itself with the effeminate *sacerdotes* described as *impuri;* but Maternus condemned both the deity in question and its followers, while Plutarch obviously wished to uphold and to protect the purity of both Apollo and his priestess, while presenting the Pythia's possession as real.

The way out of this dilemma is offered in Plutarch's text by the theory expressed by the theologian Cleombrotus, who is described both as trying to mediate between Platonic and Aristotelic metaphysical doctrines and as attacking Epicurean views. He proposes to attribute the priestess's possession to a *daimon* rather than to a *theos*, thus developing the daemonic theories of early Platonism into a more complex system, though not into the demonology of later religious and philosophical thought.[15] This concept of *daimones* as mediators between the high gods and the human sphere allowed Plutarch to do away with the paradoxical belief that something as lofty as a divine *numen* could cause *uecordia* or *manie* ("craziness, folly") by direct contact with human beings: in other terms, it provided an answer to attitudes such as Apuleius's rejection of the idea that the presence of gods (*deum praesentia*) could make humans sick and weak. But the daemonic solution of the problem of prophetic possession was combined with a theory of the adjustment and predisposition of the human body that received the daemonic spirit. This represented a reduced and rationalized version of the Aristotelic principle that *manie* was brought about by physical causes, and in particular by the bodily fluids. In turn, such a theory opened the way for the idea that, if the bodily preconditions of the possessed person required it, that person could well be invaded by a bad spirit that possessed it when it was fit.

This is especially clear in Lamprias's final intervention, which concludes the dialogue (51 = 438A–C):

> Whenever, then, the imaginative and prophetic faculty is in a state of proper adjustment for attempering itself to the spirit as to a (curative) drug, possession in those who foretell the future is bound to come; and whenever the conditions are not thus, it is bound not to come, or when it does come to be misleading, abnormal, and confusing, as we know in the case of the priestess who died not so long ago. As it happened, a deputation from abroad had arrived to consult the oracle. [. . .] She went down into the oracle unwillingly, they say, and half-heartedly; and at her first responses it was at once plain from the harshness of her voice that she was not responding properly; she was like a laboring ship and was filled with a powerful and bad spirit. Finally she became totally disturbed and with a frightful shriek rushed toward the exit and threw herself down, with the result that not only the members of the deputation fled, but also the oracle-interpreter Nicander and those holy men that were present. However, after a little, they went in and took her up; and she was conscious; and she lived on for a few days.

In the present context it is important to note that the consequence of the priests' error, caused in turn by their wish to please their foreign customers, is presented in this text as a possession by a "powerful and bad spirit."[16] So the possession by an impure spirit is not merely a Christian idea that continues the biblical motif of the possession by such a spirit in Zechariah 13–14 and refers it to the effeminate devotees of an Assyrian or African goddess. The same idea (see table 6.3) is also referred to, by a Delphic priest, in discussing the center of ancient Greek culture and the main Greek oracle. It is thus clear that both the Hellenistic and Roman and the biblical ideologies of possession and transformation contemplate three possible forms: (1) correct divine or daemonic possession, implying true prophecy; (2) feigned possession, and (3) possession by a bad or lying spirit, both of which lead to false prophecy.[17] The difference between the two systems lies not in the typology of possession itself but in other aspects. Though it is not possible here to examine these aspects, I shall conclude by hinting at some specific traits that differentiate the goddess's votaries and the biblical *n^{e}bi'im*.

Two Ideologies of Possession

First, I point to the central importance given to the possessing agent in the biblical texts, in which monotheism implies the rejection of prophetic trance connected to gods other than Yahweh. Second, I underline the "central" status of biblical prophets,[18] which may be compared to that of the Delphic priestess, but surely not to the marginal and lowly status of the goddess's votaries in Hellenistic and Roman society. The transsexual or asexual transformation of those later devotees is clearly a further aspect of their marginality: it would be unthinkable for central figures such as the biblical prophets. The fact that the lowly *galli* announce future events in only one of the texts that I have discussed here, while such a function is central in biblical prophecy, is also connected to this fundamental difference between the two types. As to the self-inflicted wounds that are so often attributed to the effeminate devotees in the Greek and Latin texts I have quoted, their presence in the biblical description

of *nᵉbi'im* is important; but what is especially meaningful is the specific quality of that presence, for, first of all, this trait appears only twice in the huge biblical prophetic corpus, and, more important, it is attributed to the two types of untruthful *nᵉbi'im:* to Baᶜal's *nᵉbi'im* in 1 Kings 18, and to a *nabi'* possessed by an unclean spirit in Zechariah 13–14.

The typology of ancient possession was thus, at least from the first century C.E., unitary, coherent, and clearly a function of the mantic character of possession-trance. The two aspects of that typology with which this essay began—that is, the idea of simulated possession and the connection between possession of some devotees by the goddess and their transsexual character—reveal their meanings not through the shortcut of hasty comparisons but only by way of careful analysis of the types in question and of their inner dynamics.

Notes

1. Leiris 1958; Métraux 1958. Translations from Greek and Latin are my own. I have also used freely the English translations published in the Loeb Classical Library.

2. Leiris 1958, 55–71.

3. On possession and gender, see the important article by J. Boddy 1994, 415–422. For a good example of transsexual behaviour in shamanism, see the case of Korea (Kut 1980, Covell 1993).

4. On such figures, see M. Beard 1994, 164–190; Roscoe 1996, 195–230; Borgeaud 1996, 61–71, 119–140. See also G. Herdt 1987, 445–454.

5. On the problems of the various Ass tales, see Anderson 1984, 198–238.

6. The treatise explains the donning of female clothes by the *galloi* with the story of a woman who desired to have intercourse with the beautiful prototypical eunuch, Combabos, and committed suicide when she found out he had castrated himself. In order to avoid such tragedies, the *galloi* wore female attire.

7. On Origen's *Contra Celsum*, see Perrone 1998, and in particular Stroumsa 1998, 81–94.

8. On this problem, see the bibliography quoted by my friend G. Lanata 1987, 236–237, 163–173.

9. See M. Borret 1969, 39.

10. E. R. Dodds 1951, 87, n. 41.

11. Some useful information and bibliography is provided by Turcan 1982, 7–74.

12. Ibid., 197–203.

13. This "impure spirit" should be compared to the "bad spirit sent from Yahweh" possessing King Saul in various passages of 1 Samuel, and to the "lying spirit" sent by Yahweh to deceive King Ahab through 400 prophets in 1 Kings 22. See my treatment of these passages in Grottanelli, *Kings*, 1998.

14. The best recent treatment of such problems is to be found in Gallo 1995. See esp. The contributions by I. Chirassi Colombo, 429–449, G. Sfameni Gasparro, 157–187, and F. Conca, 189–200. See also Grottanelli "Review," 1998, 173–179.

15. On Plutarch's demonology, see most recently Santaniello 1995, 357–371, with previous bibliography (esp. the works of F. Brenk).

16. On this episode, see Santaniello 1995.

17. On the classification of prophets (esp. Deuteronomy 18), see ch. 5 in Grottanelli forthcoming.

18. On the prophetic function and message, see most recently Sicre 1992. A clear summary and a good bibliography appear in Aune 1983, 82–152.

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HILDEGARD CANCIK-LINDEMAIER

Madness and Suffering in the Myths of Hercules

Discourses of Change

"My mind is bent to tell of forms changed into new bodies"—these are the first words of Ovid's poem that we have become used to citing under the Greek title "Metamorphoses," "transformations."[1] At the end of this poem, book 15, the philosopher Pythagoras is introduced, expounding the doctrine that the world is but change: "everything," he says, "is changing; nothing perishes."[2] Ovid brings to the fore an ample semantic field: words denoting 'the same' and 'the other,' 'the former' and 'the new,' 'staying the same' and 'being changed, altered, transformed, converted' keep recurring, as do formulas playing with the tenses of the verb 'to be': "and what we have been or what we are we shall not be tomorrow."[3]

Thus, at the very beginning of our inquiry into the meaning of the word 'transformation' in Roman culture, in a masterpiece of Latin literature we find ourselves faced with a concept intended to explain the world. This concept was not invented in Augustan times; what Ovid attributed to the figure of Pythagoras is in fact an essential ingredient of Greek cosmology, from its beginnings in sixth-century Ionia, be it the everlasting change of the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire—or of the two principles of love and strife.[4] The questions raised by the pre-Socratic philosophers continued to be asked and answered in divergent ways in Greek philosophy; let me recall Aristotle's reflections on movement and coming-into-being[5] and the problem of transition from the one to the many in Platonism. The anthropological and psychological questions we are dealing with are embedded in the philosophical framework delineated by these remarks. A network of co-texts inheres in the very notion of 'transformation' that it would be misleading to ignore in an analysis of 'cultural patterns' in Greek and Roman cultures.

The Stoic philosophers, being monists and materialists, could not go back to the interplay of opposing principles. They were obliged to construe dialectically the relationship of change and identity. Nature and life as such are conceived as evolu-

tionary processes, and so is human life; Seneca writes: "They are different (in Latin: *alia*, other), the ages of the infant, the boy, the young man, the old man; but I who have been infant and boy and young man — I am the same."[6] The nature of living beings, according to the Stoics, is not a solid block of qualities determined from beginning to end but a series of steps, phases, states; on different levels, different phenomena are 'according to nature,' and, nonetheless, the human being is thought to be one and the same and to be aware of this identity in change.[7] Seneca again: he is "one and the same amid the diverse, and he counts nothing but himself as his own."[8] In the Stoic system, this analysis of human nature is immediately translated into ethics; the result is a categorical imperative, as it were: 'be yourself' or 'become yourself'; to be dissimilar to oneself would be the absolute failure, and yet most people live like that, shifting masks continuously. "To play the role of one man" — *unum hominem agere* — this would be the ideal, but "except for the wise man," says Seneca, "nobody is playing one role, the rest of us are multiform (*multiformes*)."[9] The Stoics considered the constitution of the 'self' and of one's own self to be a complicated progress in time: there is change integrated into the identity of the person. Thus Seneca may experience his own and his friend's progress toward virtue as a "transformation": "I feel, Lucilius, that I am being not only improved, but transfigured (*transfigurari*)."[10] "For one who has learned and understood what he has to do and to avoid is not a wise man, until his mind is transfigured into what he has learned."[11]

Philosophers, then — not the Stoics alone — were strongly concerned with the problem of identity. Defining meticulously the notions of 'oneness' or 'unity' and affirming the ontological priority of the one as well as the ethical norm of being one — and this means 'conforming to reason/ nature' — they met with considerable logical problems when attempting to explain how change was possible at all, and to take the 'irrational' into account.[12] The Stoic solution, as is well known, was labeled 'paradoxical' already in antiquity.[13]

The problem discussed in terms of Stoic ethics is not, however, confined to philosophy. Cicero tried to bring together, on a more pragmatic level, philosophy and the everyday social and political experience of a citizen of the Roman republic. He conceives of the individual as a synthesis of different roles, wearing, as it were, four masks, *personae*, two of them given by nature, one imposed by circumstances and time, and the last one chosen by the individual itself.[14] There is considerable potential for conflict, since these roles are not peacefully played out one after another; rather, a continuous shifting of roles takes place within the individual. Let me mention one example — perhaps the most conspicuous one — that is, the conflict between the role of the father and the role of the magistrate, reflected in many legends. L. Brutus, who was said to have driven out the Etruscan kings, to have founded the Roman republic and been the first consul, had to learn that his own sons had conspired against the republic. The consul sentenced them to death. This model has been celebrated through the European tradition; recall the painting by Jacques Louis David. Valerius Maximus, a first-century author, summarized and interpreted the scene like this: *exuit patrem, ut consulem ageret* — "he (i.e., Brutus) took off the father in order to play the role of the consul."[15] The abundance of the-

atrical metaphors in these reflections cannot be overlooked: the mask is inscribed in the very origin of our notion of 'person'; it carries the fingerprint of Greek and Roman cultures, of their art and mythology in particular.[16] The myths provided material to be worked on; there were rifts and splits and cracks to be explored in their figures, a universe of monstrosities embracing humankind and divinities. When tragedy was invented in 5th- century Athens, the stage was opened for a special type of public discourse that possibly might include political and social life, philosophy, and religion or theology, but that was neither controlled by these domains nor identical with them. In Athens, politicians had to reckon with this forum, as did philosophers. In Roman times, the public had changed, of course, and so had public discourse. There is, however, ample evidence that neither myths nor the literary genre of drama had ceased to inspire analysis of the surface of human actions and of what lies beneath it.

We turn now to one example of radical transformation, that is, the destruction of the self, explored in the suffering and madness of Hercules as the hero of a Roman tragedy written by the Stoic philosopher L. Annaeus Seneca about the middle of the first century C.E.

Hercules: The Mythical Figure

Who is Heracles/Hercules? An all-embracing answer would be: Heracles is a cluster[17] of tales. He appears to be everywhere: his *eidolon* (shade) is in the underworld, says Homer, but he himself is on Olympus.[18] Herodotos, approaching the problem as a historian of religion, found that in Phoenicia Heracles was worshipped as a god of old, though the Greeks said he was born to Alcmene, Amphitryo's wife, in Thebes and thus was 'young,' as were all religious institutions in Greece. There were, however, Greeks who worshipped Heracles through the sacrifice due Olympian gods, as well as through the funeral cult due heroes; and this was, according to Herodotos (2,44), the best way. The Heracles of the myths is everywhere and nowhere, wandering through the world, fighting all kinds of monsters, always victorious and restless; he cleanses the earth and is called, therefore, *alexikakós*—"defender from evil." In the fifth century, a canon of twelve was created out of a great number of deeds and represented on the temple of Zeus in Olympia.[19] And yet the famous deeds are in fact labors inflicted on the son of Zeus by a trick of jealous Hera: the superman is obliged to serve an inferior master.

This mythical figure or constellation makes room for the most divergent interpretations: there is the savior in popular belief, the hero of tragedy, the drunken ruffian of comedy and farce, the model of moral philosophy, and even a medical case.[20] Trying to find an explication, scholars favor terms like ambiguity or ambivalence, if they do not—like Wilamowitz-Moellendorff—know what is "the essential": "[He] was man, became god, endured labors, won heaven."[21]

Heracles is the protagonist in three tragedies that have come down to us, a Greek one by Euripides and two Latin ones, Seneca's "Hercules Furens" and "Hercules on Mount Oeta," the latter included in the manuscript tradition of Seneca's tragedies but of doubtful authenticity. Euripides' "Heracles" and Seneca's "Hercu-

les Furens" deal with the same situation in Hercules' mythical biography: returned from the underworld, on the very summit of his glory, he kills Lycus, the tyrant of Thebes, who had threatened his family, and then — in a sudden attack of madness — his own wife and children. Seneca knew Euripides' tragedy; whether he used it directly is uncertain. Nonetheless, the two conceptions are strikingly divergent.[22]

"Hercules on Mount Oeta" ends with the hero burning himself on an enormous funeral pyre after cruel sufferings produced by a poison that his wife, Deianeira, had sent him — unknowingly.[23] Afraid of losing his love, she anointed his festival garb with a substance which she thought to be a love potion, but which actually contained the poison of the Hydra whom Heracles had once killed; deprived of his glory and seeking death in the flames of his funeral pyre, he ultimately wins heaven.

"Hercules Furens"

The prologue of Seneca's HF is spoken by the goddess Juno. Seneca uses the mythic constellation — Juno is hatefully persecuting the son of her adulterous husband — as a kind of metalevel, offering a god's-eye analysis of a human being who, as a god's son, is at the same time superhuman. This divine perspective is, in principle, opposed to the human. On the human level developed in the play, Hercules is hailed by almost everybody — his wife, his father, the chorus — as the savior of mankind;[24] and this is what he himself believes he has achieved.[25] The hateful eyes of the goddess, however, seeking a way to destroy one who has proven himself stronger than all the monsters mobilized against him, recognize that there is only one means left — that is, the hero himself. Thus Juno sounds the keynote of Seneca's conception: "You are seeking somebody who is Hercules' match? There is none if not he himself: he shall make war on himself."[26] In the mythical figure of his hero, Seneca explores the destructive possibilities within the core of a model self.

Hercules returns from the underworld just at the right moment to be — as always — a savior, in this case of his wife and children; the saving act is — as always — an act of violence: he kills the tyrant who had threatened his family. "Victorious" is the first word he utters when reentering the scene; as a "victor" he prepares a sacrifice and addresses the gods as his equals (vv. 895–908).[27] The prayer he conceives to be "worthy of Jupiter and me" (v. 927) paints the return of the golden age; there is no longer evil in the world, and if there were, Hercules would abolish it. At this point the vision of peace turns into the hallucination of a last battle left for Hercules: he sees himself assailing heaven and fiercely leading the Titans against Jupiter — that is, reversing the order of the world, as Juno had prophesied. At the same time, he sees himself threatened by the Giants and the furies of the underworld.[28] Raging, as he is accustomed to do, against these hallucinatory monsters, he kills his sons and his wife, watched by a horrified Amphitryo, who tries in vain to hold him back (vv. 987–1026).

Hercules' frenzy, as has been repeatedly observed, is construed as the reverse of his 'sane' life.[29] The fifth act corroborates this interpretation. Hercules' impulse after awakening from his madness and recognizing what he has done, and that it is he who has done it, is to punish himself.[30] Now he himself is the *monstrum* to be

removed.[31] The discussion in terms of error and guilt deeply entwined reveals Hercules as a prisoner of his heroic role. He never knew mercy and, therefore, is unable to pardon himself (v. 1267).

There is a figure in the play, Hercules' companion Theseus, who is involved on the mythic level, since Hercules had freed him in the underworld. As regards the action, however, he stands apart, his function being similar to Juno's: he, too, is an observer and commentator from outside; but unlike Juno, he is Hercules' friend. In the middle of the play, he is given a long revelation speech describing the underworld and narrating how Hercules had terrified even its rulers and eventually drawn its watchdog, Cerberus, to the upperworld.[32] In the madness scene, the reader will remember Theseus's words, that the dog "was mad with rage and attempting vain war" (v. 820). In the fifth act, it is Theseus, again, who gives a metalevel comment when he admonishes Hercules to recall virtue: "Now get back your mind which to no evil is unequal," that is, which is a match for every evil. These words clearly correspond to those of Juno, that nobody but Hercules is a match for Hercules.[33] Are we to conclude that Hercules is the evil for which he is a match?

Hercules' final decision not to commit suicide is not the last step toward liberty and peace; there is no "redeeming transformation" to a "deeper kind of heroism," as the editor and commentator John Fitch puts it.[34] Stoic key words cannot be ignored in this discourse, but there is, indeed, no transformation or "transfiguration" in the play akin to what Seneca had experienced in his epistles.[35] Seneca, I would argue, approached the problems of identity and transformation in a subtler way.

When Hercules awakes from the state of exhaustion he has fallen into (vv. 1138ff.), he does not know where he is or what has happened or who has perpetrated what he slowly is becoming aware of. He does not recognize himself, that is, the image he has of himself, for he is fearful (v. 1146: *paveo*). And, indeed, he does not look like Hercules, since his insignia have been taken away—the lion's skin and the weapons that represent his famous deeds, that is, his identity (vv. 1150–54). He feels defeated and seeks his "conqueror" (v. 1156), not knowing that he is seeking himself. In a series of short questions and answers between Hercules and Amphitryo, this quest, comparable to that of Oedipus, is pushed forward until eventually Hercules realizes: this crime is his. His proof: nobody but Hercules himself is able to handle Hercules' weapons (vv. 1197–1200). He thus finds himself where he would never have expected to be; this self is not his. And yet he is obliged to recognize himself in the frenzy whose characteristic, as Amphitryo diagnoses, is "to rage against himself" (vv. 1220f.). Hercules' self is destroyed to the point that he cannot tell whether his mind is sane again or still in the grip of the frenzy (vv. 1243f.). There is no longer a stable identity. The complexity of transformative processes explored by Seneca in this tragedy almost exceeds the linguistic capacities of reflexive pronouns.

Suffering and Apotheosis in "Hercules on Mount Oeta"

The audience of ancient tragedies was well acquainted with mythology. They knew that the end of HF was not 'the end'; Hercules' mythical biography continued. On the level of myth, there had been a temporary transformation—from heroism to madness—but the final one was still to come at the very end of Hercules' life. This,

as already mentioned, is the subject of "Hercules on Mount Oeta": tortured by the poison, Hercules loses his form; the model of strength is transformed into a picture of misery, the hero longing in the end for redeeming death. The main elements of the plot are laid out in the mythical tradition. For our purposes, we need not enter into the discussion on authorship or the question of direct imitation of the HF tragedy; there are references to the latter,[36] but they may be due to the common mythical tradition.

The dominating theme in the second half of the play is the loss of physical identity. A crude picture of decline is presented in long verses lamenting the gap between then and now, summed up in a pathetic "ecce homo"—behold, world, what is left of Hercules; the savior is imploring salvation.[37] The pathos is pushed to a point where it gives rise to unintentional comic effects: when Alcmena, Hercules' mother, enters the stage, she can hardly find him: "Where are your limbs, where is the star-bearing neck which carried the sky?" (vv. 1343ff.). Almost driven to madness by pain, Hercules recalls his former frenzy, which he thinks he is now surpassing: "It is not rage that has taken away my (sane) mind; this evil is worse than anger; I like to rage against myself."[38] That the poisoned garment is glued to his limbs is highly suggestive; he cannot take it off, it has become a second skin.[39]

Hercules against himself: this is again the well-known constellation that is interpreted as the core of his fate—by the author of HO as well. And this is what Hercules understands when he learns that the poison devouring him is Hydra's[40]: eventually the invincible Hercules is to be overcome by his dead enemy or, as he himself puts it: "There was not to be a victor surviving Hercules" (v. 1480). He now consciously prepares his death as that of a hero or a sage. The messenger's report is painting passion scenes whose almost Christian colors were noted long ago: The hero's mother is standing near the pyre "almost similar to her son";[41] and he, reclining full of self-assurance (*sui securus*), addresses his last prayer to his heavenly father.[42] The messenger spends some thirty verses describing the imperturbable braveness of the burning Hercules.

Hercules' transformation is total and irreversible now; there is but a small heap of ashes left, brought onto the stage by Alcmena.[43] Unable to accept the annihilation, she is alternating between faith—imagining that even his relics are powerful (vv. 1828–31), a notion that is, in fact, the basis of hero worship in Greek and Roman religions—and an atheism of despair (vv. 1909ff.). Yet, at the very bottom of abasement, the voice of Hercules is heard announcing that the fire has removed his mortal part, whereas the divine nature inherited from his father is going to heaven.[44] The final transformation, then, is this apotheosis by fire.[45] The play ends with the perspective of a cult foundation: Alcmena is going to Thebes to announce and praise the new god (vv. 1981f.).

Reflections on Myth

Hercules' 'madness' or rage is an ancient ingredient of his myths; it may even belong to pre-Homeric epic.[46] Hercules' double existence after death is attested in the Odyssey.[47] From the middle of the sixth century onward, we have paintings representing Hercules' solemn entry in Olympus.[48] Hercules' myths were widespread, and so were his cults, throughout the Mediterranean—not only in the East. Virgil, for

instance, attributes the foundation of the famous cult at the Ara Maxima in Rome to Hercules himself, thus including him in the foundation story of the city.[49]

Philosophers of different schools made use of Herculean mythology. The sophist Prodicos places him at the crossroads, deciding to follow the steep path of virtue; he also became a model Cynic and one of the personifications of the Stoics' wise man.[50] Some Stoic allegorists considered him to be but one name for the all-embracing divinity of Nature, his death by fire signifying the renewal of the world in the cosmic fire.[51]

Greek scientists and physicians attempting to define the nature of the human being, the unity of the individual and the conditions of his greatness, borrowed heavily — images and key words — from mythology. The "disease of Heracles" (*Heracleia nosos*) is a conspicuous example, with an extraordinary career in European art and literature.[52] In antiquity, this name covers symptoms from epilepsy to madness; it was given theoretical shape on the basis of the science of humoral physiopathology developed by the Hippocratic school.[53] The Hippocratics were scientists and monists; they considered diseases to be multifactoral processes unfolding over many stages and rejected any dualistic or supranatural explication, even of 'madness.'[54] In the (Pseudo-)Aristotelian treatise entitled *Problemata Physika*,[55] the myths of Heracles are used to demonstrate a certain constitutional type characterized by the overflowing of black bile and therefore called *melancholic*. It is the concept of *melancholia* which — according to the author of the *Problemata* — provides coherence to the mythical biography of Heracles, since not only "the frenzy toward his children" but also his suffering on Mount Oeta, which is interpreted as an "eruption of sores," are said to be caused by black bile.[56] "The melancholy genius model," to quote Heinrich von Staden, "renders Heracles' diseases a necessary condition of his outstanding achievements."[57] This model was handed down through the centuries; it is discussed by Cicero, occurs in Virgil, and is attested in Seneca's prose writings and in Plutarch.[58] A twofold Heraclean tradition was ultimately received in Elizabethan England — Senecan tragedy as well as the medical conception — and this double vision was to become a most influential model for the representation of madness in Elizabethan drama.[59]

The model of explication in terms of humoral physiopathology is clearly not compatible with Plato's conception of "divine madness" (*theía manía*) as a medium of inspiration, referring to the religious phenomenon of ecstatic prophecy; but it did not supersede it. Heraclitus's Sibyl already had spoken "with raving mouth," and so did Virgil's.[60] Cicero acknowledges divination in ecstasy (*furor*) as a particular category. He subscribes to the dualistic explication that in this case the soul is separated from the body, but he is considerably embarrassed by Aristotle.[61] There were competing conceptions of 'madness,' divergent attempts to get hold of these bewildering phenomena indicating that something in the individual, or the individual itself, could be fundamentally changed — if not transformed. In Greek and Roman religions as practiced, however, ecstasy appears to be marginal; this is valid even for the cults of Dionysos. "How 'mad' were the maenads?" There is, as Albert Henrichs has shown, evidence for physical exhaustion in the trieteric celebrations of women, but not for an "abnormal state of mind,"[62] notwithstanding the proliferation of 'madness' in the Dionysiac imaginaire — ancient and modern.[63]

Conclusion: A Philosopher's Tragedy

Given the particular emphasis on process in Stoic anthropology and ethics, Seneca's interest in Hercules' mythical biography would not appear surprising. In fact, the actors and the chorus discuss and interpret what is going on in terms familiar from philosophical teaching; they speak of anger, rage, insanity (*ira, furor, insania*), virtue and crime (*virtus/scelus*), error and guilt (*error/culpa*). Fortunately, scholars have now abandoned the oversimplified view of versified examples, which neglects the autonomy of both mythical traditions and of art,[64] the potential of Stoic philosophy,[65] and the "deviousness and complexity of Seneca's mind."[66]

Seneca wrote, it is true, a treatise entitled "On Anger" (*De ira*), where he deals with anger, rage, and madness. He says that anger is a particularly abominable and eventually inhuman vice that is by no means compatible with virtue or to be found in the wise man. "Will anyone call the man sane who, as if seized by a hurricane, does not walk but is driven along at the mercy of raging evil, who does not entrust his revenge to another but, exacting it himself, rages in his mind and with his hands, and becomes the murderer of those who are dearest and of things for which, when lost, he soon will weep?"[67] Hercules is not mentioned, nor is there a quotation from the tragic *Hercules Furens*, and yet all this sounds like an abstract of its plot. What is staged, however, does not square the philosophical argument in a moralizing or didactic sense. Seneca does not go back to poetry in order to corroborate philosophy or to demonstrate vice, virtue, a true Stoic, or a wise man.[68] There is on the stage, it appears, a surplus of reflection that cannot be grasped by questions like these: "Could a Stoic philosopher have approved of this or that word uttered by a dramatis persona?" or: "Was hat Seneca mit seinen Tragödien gewollt?" (Th. Birt, 1911).

In both plays *personae* — roles — are acted out, their potentials psychologically explored. Mythical traditions and cultural experience are confronted in the field of the dramatic text. Thus a conflicting process is engendered in which the terms — philosophical conceptions included — begin to move and are pushed to their very limits. This process transcends dogmas and precepts as well as any kind of example.[69] Critical situations in the growing up of the individual, the conditions of human activity, the instability of achievement and its secret connections with failure, the dialectics of norms and deviation — all this is analyzed, the myths allowing these constellations to be worked out in the imaginaire, that is, as experimental action without consequences in practice.

There is a specifically Stoic perspective inherent in these general approaches to what is human, inhuman, and superhuman, what constitutes the individual, and how the subject is to be conceived. To be sane of mind, beyond evil, to be one and always identical to oneself, a benefactor of humankind and even godlike — these are in fact predicates of the Stoic wise man.[70] In the plays, they are enacted and thus problematized; the fragility of a philosophical unity, and its risks, are performed. There is in the HF an enquiry into the destruction of the self with an end open to the possibility of failure; in the HO there is a theological sketch about divinization through abasement and suffering, ending in the twofold existence granted in the Roman ruler-cult. "In a little while you will be no one and nowhere, even as Ha-

drian and Augustus are no more," the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius says to himself,[71] notwithstanding the fact that his predecessors are being venerated as *Divi*. We have here what may perhaps be called the definition of a multiple self: Marcus Aurelius's personal identity will vanish; as a Roman emperor he will become a *Divus* worshipped in a temple, and his corpse will be buried in the mausoleum and receive the funeral cult due to the *Di Manes*.

There is clearly no need to revive well-known prejudices against Stoicism as a frozen rationalism locked into an immobile, because predetermined, cosmos. In Stoic anthropology and ethics, the constitution of the individual is conceived as a multistage and multifactored process, guided from its very beginning by self-consciousness. The two plays we have examined point to such a complex conception of self, which has more general implications for our understanding of classical antiquity. I conclude with a few such general remarks.

Evidence for reflection on identity and change is to be found in different fields of ancient culture, not least in art and poetry, the stage offering an eminent platform for public discourses.

Neither the Greeks nor the Romans were unaware of the complexity of the human individual, his or her vulnerability to time and circumstances and highly endangered synthetic character.

This evidence can be connected to modern conceptions, or, vice versa, modern conceptions can be introduced as categories of interpretation and intercultural comparison. To mention only a few:

There is a quest for the "subject" in law, particularly in international law and the field of human rights, as well as in sociological and philosophical theories of social behavior. These theories focus on interaction and communication conceived of as subject-subject relations and/or dialogical structures; there are tentative attempts to determine the self as a stable, but not fixed, active center whose function is to organize the "changing identities" of social roles.

Social theories like interactionism, as well as psychoanalysis, and especially ethnopsychoanalysis, favor phase models: the constitution of individuality through subsequent stages is intimately connected to the possibility of phantasies and experimental acting. Within and through these processes, tradition is created and identity acquired.

It appears to be characteristic that in all of these concepts a stable identity is based not on immobility but on processes of change and transformation, even on the simultaneous performance of divergent roles. In terms of the interdisciplinary character of cross-cultural studies, I would like to suggest that we examine the analytical potential of such theories. They might help establish a framework for cultural comparison that is not exclusively based on necessarily limited religious premises.

Notes

1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1,1f.: *In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora* (hereafter *Met.*). The verb *metamorphoústhai* is used by the gospels of Mt. (17:2) and Mk (9:3) in the scene on Mount Tabor; the Vulgata translates: *transfiguratus*.

2. *Met.* 15,165: *omnia mutantur, nil interit.* Cf. 15, 252–258; 255ff: *nascique vocatur/ incipere esse aliud, quam quod fuit ante, morique/ desinere illud idem.* Pythagoras's speech goes from 15,75–477. The word *mutare,* to change, is used more than fifty times in the poem: *transformare* occurs only thrice, never charged with philosophical meaning as *mutare* is.

3. *Met.* 15, 215f.: *nec quod fuimusve sumusve/ cras erimus.*

4. The elements changing continuously (*Met.* 15,237–251): cf. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983: ch. 7, "Pythagoras"; Love and Strife: Empedocles, ibid., especially frgs. 348f. and 387f., 401; there are reminiscences of these theories throughout ancient literature.

5. Cf., e.g., Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1042a/b; 1069b — the key words are *metabolé, metabállein, alloíosis, génesis/ phthorá* vs. *hypoménein, diaménein; to állon — to autón.* To add a Stoic of the second century C.E.: Marcus Aurelius, *In Semet Ipsum* 8,6: Nature's work is to change, *metabállein:* all is transformations, *panta tropaí.*

6. Sen. *Epistles* 121,16.: *Alia est aetas infantis, pueri, adulescentis, senis; ego tamen idem sum qui et infans fui et puer et adulescens.*

7. Seneca expounds the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis* in the following: 17–24. Cf. Cancik 1998b.

8. Seneca, *De Const. Sap.* 6,3: *unus idemque inter diversa (sit) neque quicquam suum nisi se (putet) esse* (Seneca 1958; vol. 1; I have slightly altered the translation).

9. Sen. *Ep.* 120,22.

10. Sen. *Ep.* 6,1; 6,2: *subita mutatio mei* — "a sudden change of myself"; R. M. Gummere's translation (Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales,* LCL 1953, 3 vols.), "in myself," though grammatically possible, does not seem correct to me.

11. Sen. *Ep.* 94,48. The word *transformari* is not to be found in Seneca. Quintilian (1,2,30) uses it to denote the orator's task: *hinc (animum) transformari quodammodo ad naturam eorum de quibus loquimur.*

12. In systems with opposing principles — mind vs. matter; soul vs. body — the task is said to be easier; cf., e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13, 1102b 13–35: there is, by nature, an irrational part in the soul; cf. the three parts of the soul in Plato, *Republic* 4.439d–441a: *logistikón — thymoeidés — epithymetikón* or the well-known image of the charioteer and his unequal team: *Phaidros* 246ff.

13. See Cancik-Lindemaier 1998; as regards the irrational, see e.g., Arnim 1903–1924, *SVF* 1 frg. 202 and 3 frg. 459 (hereafter *SVF*): there is no "irrational" (*álogon*) part of the soul; the soul, being entirely "rational" *logiké,* can be changed from virtue into vice. Plutarch, who attributes this doctrine to Zeno, Chrysippos, and other Stoics, uses the words *metabállein, metabolé* to denote this process. Cf. Sen., *De ira* 1,8,2, and further *SVF* 3 frg. 389: the "irrational" is "disobedient to the *lógos.*"

14. Cicero, *De Officiis* 1,107. 115; cf. Cancik 1998b.

15. Valerius Maximus 5,8,1; other famous examples of conflict between public institutions and family: Valerius Maximus 1,2,4; 5,10, esp. 5,10,1.

16. World and life are the stage, human beings the actors, the roles they are playing being masks — *personae.* The metaphor could be lived, as is shown by the famous last words ascribed to the emperor Augustus: "Do applaud, my friends" (Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 99).

17. I owe this term to von Staden 1992, 131.

18. Hom. *Odyssey* 11,601ff.

19. See Brommer 1979 and 1984. The temple of Zeus was erected in the first half of the 5th century.

20. See Fink 1960; von Staden 1992.

21. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1895, 2:38: "Mensch gewesen, Gott geworden; Mühen erduldet, Himmel erworben: das ist das Wesentliche an dem Herakles"; cf. Fitch 1987; the first chapter of the introduction (15–20) is entitled: "The Ambivalent Hero."

22. Fitch, in his commentary on HF, is accounting carefully for passages that may reveal Euripidean color. For Euripides' "Heracles," written possibly about 424/420, see Wilamowitz 1959; on Euripides' interpretation of Heracles' madness, see, e.g., Dodds 1966.

23. The subject roughly corresponds to Sophocles' tragedy *Trachiniae* (The Women of Trachis). We are not concerned here with the numerous problems of the HO: originality and authorship, the relationship to Sophocles, and the unity of the play, which is unusually long — 1996 verses — and split into two almost independent parts.

24. Suspicion and vituperation uttered by the tyrant Lycus are clearly dictated by (human) envy and as such belong to the surface of the plot, the inferior rival trying to denigrate the hero.

25. Vv. 926ff.: Hercules' prayer; its first word is *ipse* — I myself (926b).

26. Vv. 84f.: *quaeris Alcidae parem?/ nemo est nisi ipse: bella iam secum gerat.*

27. The hostile allusion to the "stepmother" Juno (v. 908) recalls, as Fitch (1987) rightly remarks, Juno's complaints "about Jupiter's bastards inhabiting heaven"; but it is also a hint at the secret working of her analysis. Cf. also vv. 963, 1018.

28. Vv. 939–974 and 976–986; Juno's prophecy: vv. 64ff.

29. For pertinent observations, see Fitch's commentary and particularly pp. 24–33; p. 30: "Seneca explores the continuity between the sane and the insane mind." — Fitch (1987) vv. 944–52 points out — after others — that the monsters killed by Hercules are similar to him (particularly as regards rage); he is carrying them with him, cf. v. 45f.: *armatus venit leone.* Though emphasizing the endogenic origin of Hercules' madness (p. 32) Fitch pays no attention to the reflections on self-consciousness that are prominent in the awakening scene (vv. 1138–1200).

30. From v. 1202 onward.

31. Vv. 1279ff.: *purgare terras propero. iam dudum mihi/ monstrum impium saevumque et inmite ac ferum/ oberrat* — cf. HO 55f.: *Hercules monstri loco/ iam coepit esse.* In the same way he had during his frenzy perceived his little son, *parvulum hoc monstrum occidat* (1020), and identified him with his last enemy, Lycus (v. 988).

32. Vv. 650–829, interrupted only by Amphitryo's questions. In the economy of the play, the scene is to bridge the absence of Hercules, who is meanwhile killing Lycus.

33. Vv. 1275f.: *nunc tuum nulli imparem/ animum malo resume;* cf. vv. 84f.

34. Fitch, p. 35f.; Fitch rightly supposes that scholars expecting a "redeeming transformation" are orientated either toward the Euripidean model or toward a didactic version of Stoic dogmatism.

35. See sec. 1, pp. 106ff.

36. Hercules, planning to take revenge on his wife, Deianeira, remembers Megara, who had been his first wife, (vv. 1452f.): *o cara Megara, tune cum furerem mihi/ coniunx fuisti?* — an interesting hint about what it meant to be the faithful wife of Hercules, the model male who is considering, albeit in rage and desperation, that his last labor will be a woman: *summus legatur femina Herculeus labor* (v. 1455). I pass over what ought to be said on this topic, but cf. Loraux 1985. There is something like a — weak — repetition of the madness-scene in HF: Alcmene calls his pains *furor* (v. 1407) and removes his weapons, when Hercules, exhausted by his raging, has fallen asleep.

37. HO vv. 1161–1336: note the importance of the word *ego.* Vv. 1233f.: *en, cernite, urbes, cernite ex illo Hercule/ quid iam supersit.* Regenbogen 1930, 203, has rightly pointed out the intimate relation to martyrdom.

38. Vv. 823ff.; cf. the comment of his son Hyllos: people think that his old rage has come back (vv. 806f.); cf. v. 1460.

39. See pp. 195ff and von Staden 1992.

40. Allusions to the victory over the Hydra are recurring in the evocation of Hercules' glorious past.

41. V. 1690; cf. vv.1738f.: *nunc es parens Herculea: sic stare ad rogum,/ te, mater, inquit, sic decet fieri Herculem.* The relationship between the religions of Heracles and Christus is given attention in all histories of Graeco-Roman religions, cf. Regenbogen 1930, 206. As regards the history of religious studies, it may not be useless to recall Friedrich Pfister's thesis (ARW 1937, 59f.) that the author of the "Urevangelium" used a cynic-stoic biography of Heracles as a model for the life of Jesus. This is, of course, to be read in the context of the year 1937 in Germany and its impact on the renowned revue *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft.*

42. Vv. 1693–1715; translations tend to blur the philosophical terminology. Miller (Seneca 1952, vol. 2) translates: "careless of self"; to be *securus*, however, is an outstanding characteristic of the wise man, cf. Sen. *Const. Sap.* 6,3 (see n. 8): Basore translates "with unconcern."

43. Vv. 1758f.; follows a long complaint repeating once more the labors of Hercules and violently blaming the powerlessness of the gods. This type of atheism arising from desperation is not unknown in antiquity; it makes the epiphany which usually follows more glorious. Diodorus (4,38,5) explicitly says that Hercules' friends who came to gather the bones, as is required by the funeral rites, did not find them.

44. Vv. 1940–43 and 1963–1976. There is iconographic evidence for this conception: a contemporary of Seneca, the elder Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* 35,139 = *Lexicon* 1981ff. nr. 2921) describes a Greek painting brought to Rome by Augustus representing Hercules going to heaven from Mount Oeta where his "mortality had been burnt out." Three Attic vases (dating from 420–380 B.C.E. = *Lexicon* 1981ff. nrs. 2916–2918) show the pyre beneath the chariot bringing Hercules to Olympus; on the pyre is an object interpreted as a "muscle-corselet modelled like a bare torso . . . a highly effective image as a mortal husk" (Boardman 1986, 129; Brommer 1984, 93–98, figs. 47 and 48); Brommer (1984, 93) had already emphasized that Hercules' armor is the lion skin, not a corselet.

45. Cf. *Met.* 9,263–270, apotheosis as metamorphosis.

46. Kullmann 1960, 257f. and 96, assumes that the subject of the Kypria and a corresponding epic are probably prior to the Iliad; in this case, the madness would belong to the oldest tradition (against Wilamowitz). For the iconography of the raging Heracles, see Brommer 1984, 21f.: in the few representations known to us, there are apparently no specific indications of madness.

47. Hom. *Od.* 11,601ff.

48. See Brommer 1984, 95ff.

49. Virg. *Eneid* 8,268–272. For the mythical configuration of Hercules and Omphale as a medium for the self-representation of a Roman woman, see Cancik-Lindemaier 1985.

50. Zeno was said to have surpassed Heracles (Diog. Laert. 7,29); Cleanthes was called the "second Heracles" (Diog. Laert. 7,170). Tertullian (*Apologeticum* 14) mentions a Heracles poem by Diogenes of Sinope. See further: Dio of Prusa *Orationes* 1,84; 8,30ff.; Epictetus, Diss. 2,16,44 and 3,24,12ff. (H. the son and friend of Zeus).

51. Sen. *De beneficiis* 4,8,1; cf. *SVF* 1,514 (Cornutus): Hercules is the tension (*tonos*), the strength in Nature, maintaining everything.

52. See von Staden 1992. I am grateful to Vivian Nutton for bringing this study to my attention. Further examples are known of approaching a problem within a mythical figure: e.g., Varro, *Orestes vel de insania* (Gellius 13,4).

53. For concise information, see Grmek 1996, 267–275.

54. "The ancient physicians thought all diseases to be of bodily nature" (Grmek 1996, 277).

55. Ps.-Aristot., *Probl. Phys.* 30,1 (953a 10–955a 41), see the German translation and the notes by H. Flashar (ed.), *Aristoteles. Problemata Physica* in *Aristoteles: Werke*, ed. E. Grumach, vol. 19 (Darmstadt 1962), esp. 714.

56. *Probl.* 953a 18.

57. Von Staden 1992, 150.

58. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 1,33,80; Virgil, *Eneid* 8,219–220; Sen. *De tranquillitate animi* 17,10; Plutarch, *Lysandros* 2,3 (LCL vol. 4).

59. See Soellner 1959, e.g., 313: Thomas Farnaby, the editor of *Senecae Tragoediae* (London, 1613), uses the melancholy model in his comments. The terms *Herculanus/ Herculeus morbus* were frequent in the Renaissance Latin dictionaries (Soellner, 314); the melancholy theory had been received in contemporary medicine.

60. Heraclitus frg. 245, Kirk, Raven, and Schofield; Virgil *Eneid* 6, 47–51 and 77–80; and Servius, *Commentary to Virgil's Eneid*, a.l.

61. Cicero, *De divinatione* 1,34; 1,70; 1,81. In the *Tusculanae disputationes* (3,4,7–5,10), he tries to establish a neat distinction between diseases of the body and diseases of the soul and gets stuck on the problems of terminology (*insania, sanitas, insipientia, dementia, stultitia*) and translation: "What we call *furor* they (i.e., the Greeks) call *melancholia*, as if the mind would be moved by black bile only and not often by stronger anger or fear or pain." (3,5,11). This criticism misses the point of the medical concept, which deliberately rejects dualism.

62. Henrichs 1982, 144–147. The methodological premises of this exposition run as follows (p. 146): "Theories of religious origins, however fascinating, are poor substitutes for documented religious history."

63. As regards the career of these conceptions in modern scholarship, see, e.g., Henrichs 1984 and Cancik 1986/98.

64. See survey in Fitch 1987, 21 (a list of pros and cons, n. 19). For a very short and acute analyis of the problem, see the introduction in Dingel 1974, 11–19. Dingel's merit in emphasizing the autonomy of poetry and refuting the idea of dramatic exemplification appears not to have been fully acknowledged by Senecan scholars; see the survey by Hiltbrunner 1985, esp. 1004–1006; but cf. Nussbaum 1994, 448f. with n. 13.

65. Perceptive evaluations of Stoic philosophy as regards Senecan tragedy in Fitch's commentary to HF; see also Pratt 1983, 44–71. An interesting approach to Seneca's Medea: Nussbaum 1994, 438–483; I wonder how far the idea of "two selves . . . in the world" can reach (470).

66. Calder 1987/88, 341.

67. Sen. *De ira* 3,3,3 f. See the stimulating discussion in Nussbaum 1994, 402–438, with pertinent reflections on the notion of 'self'; p. 353, a reference to stoicism in Michel Foucault.

68. See Dingel 1974, ch. 2: "Die Negation der Philosophie"; cf. also Fitch 1987, 43, who insists on the "independence of literary genres in antiquity."

69. For the function of dogmas and precepts (*decreta/praecepta*), see Cancik-Lindemaier 1967, 42–45.

70. That the wise man is an image and likeness of god is a standing topic in the allegoreses of myths: cf. Virgil *Eneid* 8,364f.: (Euander to Aeneas) *et te quoque dignum finge deo* (i.e., Hercules), quoted in Sen. *Epp.* 18,12 and 31,11 in order to encourage the individual progressing toward virtue; cf. also *Ep.* 41,2 referring to *Eneid* 8,352.

71. Marcus Aurelius (161–180 C.E.), *To Himself* (*In Semet Ipsum*) 8.5; as far as I can see, the interpreters of this booklet are not interested in this remarkable phenomenon.

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SHAUL SHAKED

Healing as an Act of Transformation

The field of enquiry of this essay is what may be termed the popular religion of Sasanian Babylonia. The material from which we can try to reconstruct it is rather limited. In the present context, I shall concentrate on the numerous magical texts in a variety of Aramaic dialects that have come to light from Mesopotamia. They display to us at least one aspect of the faith and practice of people in Babylonia during the Sasanian period, mostly between the fifth and the seventh centuries C.E.[1]

In historical terms, this faith can be described as an amalgam of pieces of mythology and religious perceptions that derive from the different cultures of the region before this period and contemporary with it. The best-known religions of this period are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Mandaeism, and they are probably complemented by remnants of Babylonian paganism, by notions derived from Greek culture, and by other faiths that are less conspicuous in our corpus of texts, such as Manichaeism and Christianity.

The most conspicuous elements of the perception of the world in this popular religion are the following. We live surrounded by numerous invisible beings, good and evil, as well as by some that can be ambiguously either good or evil. In contrast to some of the main faiths of the period, in which the division between good and evil entities is rigid and the borderline between them constitutes an insurmountable barrier, the dualistic divisions are treated in this popular religion with a great deal of fluidity. Many of the invisible beings are given epithets that identify them as belonging to either one of these camps, but the language used in addressing them is not always consistent with the epithet employed.

The dualism that comes into expression in these texts is not absolute. It is based on an acute awareness of tensions in the human world, as well as in the world of the supernatural, but not everywhere is there a clear identification of the nature of the different powers. It is difficult sometimes to decide which powers belong to the camp of the good and which belong to the other camp.

Stylistically, we encounter a paradoxical situation: the language used is often powerful, with strong idioms and striking metaphors, and yet the general picture

tends to be fuzzy, with the result that we find ourselves from time to time unable to draw a clear map of the relationships. These observations are important for understanding the climate of the texts we are dealing with.

As an example of the contrast between strong language that uses powerful expressions, on the one hand, and a murky landscape that leaves the delineation of functions blurred and ambiguous, on the other, one could quote the following passage:

> By the power of the Great One,
> and by the command of the angels,
> and by the name of the lord Bagdana Aziza,
> the great one of the gods.
> And the king, head of the sixty kingdoms,
> whose power is that of a blast,
> whose heat is that of fire,
> whose practice is that of slaying,
> whose chastisement is that of battle.
> That which is alive he eats,
> that which is unmixed he drinks.
> His head is that of a lion,
> his molar teeth are those of a she-wolf,
> his teeth are those of a tiger.
> The draughts of his mouth are furnaces of fire,
> his eyes are glowing lightnings,
> his shoulders are the spheres in a cloud,
> his temples are an anvil of iron,
> his arms are two hammers,
> his chest is that of an evil man,
> his belly is a lake without canals,
> his back is (of) alum,
> his legs are of brass and iron,
> his sandals are those of sparks,
> his chariot is that of the evil ones.
> He comes, and there is in his hand a sword for slaying.
> There came the lord, there came the troop.
> He came against them, against the demons, against the devs, against the evil lilith.[2]

The mythical scene depicted here abounds in vivid descriptions and colorful encounters. The person first described is apparently a wicked character, although this seems to come without proper introduction after a series of invocations beginning with the formula "by the name of," which should refer to positive entities, angels or deities who are assumed to guard humans. There follows a description of the evil person, who is called "the king, head of the sixty kingdoms," but without being accorded a proper name. The attributes of the person include intense heat, violence and annihilation, and uncivilized, beastlike behavior. This is brought to life by his way of eating and drinking: eating uncooked flesh, drinking unmixed wine, two features that mark one who does not belong to human society. It is also underlined by his physical similarity to ferocious animals. The next phrase, beginning with, "There came the lord, there came the troop," apparently introduces a positive figure, again without giving it a proper name. It is merely called "the lord, the troop," that goes to fight against the demon.

One cannot help feeling that the sharp transitions between good and evil persons, moves that can hardly be noticed in the flow of the poetry, are an essential part of the perception of these characters. None of them seems to have a very clear identity, or even as much as a proper name. They hide behind a mask of vague general designation, or sometimes behind an indefinite collective attribute. Their ambiguity is apparent by the fact that they are highly differentiated as to their function, and at the same time they are blurred and elusive when we wish to find out something about their individual existence. This stylistic trait seems to me to possess considerable significance.

Not only is there ambiguity in these characters, they also have a multiplicity of names and designations. It is a feature of these texts that a large number of alternative proper names and attributes are heaped onto a single god, angel or demon. Some texts list a long row of such names, as in the following text:

> [1] By your name I act, holy.
>
> [2] May there be healing from heaven to Mahdukh daughter of [3] Newandukh. May she be healed and protected from all spirits, from all blast-demons and harmful beings [4] that exist in the world.
>
> By the name of Yah, King of all kings of kings, Raphael, Misal Milas, who are appointed over hundreds [5] of evil spirits: the spirit that lies among the graves, the spirit that lies among the roofs, the spirit that lies in the body, the head, [6] the temples, the ear, and the sockets of the eyes of Mahdukh daughter of Newandukh, and the spirit whose name is Agag daughter of Baroq daughter of Baroqta daughter of [7] Naqor daughter of Namon daughter of the evil eye.
>
> They call you Mesamita (= the blinding one), Mašrita (= the loosening one), 'Awirta (= the blind one), they call you Mahgarta (= the lame one), they call you Garbanita (= the itchy one), they call you Šefofati (= the crushed one). [8] I adjure you, you, evil spirit, [who met Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa], and at that time Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa said to her the biblical verse: "You make darkness [and it becomes night,] [9] [a time at which] all the animals of the forest creep" (Ps. 104:20).
>
> Again I adjure you, and again I beswear you, you, evil spirit, that you should not go or become to Mahdukh daughter of Newandukh, either [10] a companion by night or a companion by day or by night.
>
> [If you go] and attach yourself to the head, temples, ear, flank, the sockets of the eye of Mahdukh daughter of Newandukh . . .
>
> [11] . . . the mighty ones, against whom Nura'el, Raphael and Michael were sent by the name of Yah Yah, "YHWH strong and mighty, YHWH mighty in battle" (Ex. 15:3).
>
> "[I would hasten my escape from the] [12] windy storm and tempest" (Ps. 55:9).[3]

It is important to realize that these pale, hardly differentiated characters form an important part of the society in which we humans live. The view of the people whose writings we are trying to understand was that human society may be divided into two parts. One section is visible, and its members usually carry individual identities. The other is invisible, and its members as a rule do not possess a clear identity or a definite visual image. This invisible section of society possesses as much of a real

presence in our lives as do the visible members of our society. This model cannot be empirically tested, but it is not much different, at least in the sense that it resists corroboration, from the notion current among us according to which the human mind consists of two distinct layers, one conscious and the other unconscious.

The definition of those invisible members of society is rather fluid. Angels and demons, those that are "officially" recognized, are, of course, part of that world. But other entities can be added to them almost at will. Here is an example of what seems to be a list of invisible entities that is perhaps made up ad hoc:

> Bound are all the evil sorcerers and mighty [4] . . . and all evil sickness of the day and of the night, and all envoy (?) of any hour [5] or time, and all evil binding, delivery, stopping, idolatry, bastardry, imprisonment, [6] and the face (?) of . . . and a court of law, and overturned faces and overturned palm branches and (idle) talk [7] <and> a scourge (?) and all . . . [and] magic acts and vows and all kinds of enemies and male and female destroyers. Stopped and annulled are [8] all . . . they are scared and made to depart and keep away from [NN].[4]

The entities listed here include some magical gestures and some social activities—like those done at a court of law—that stand out as belonging to a sphere different from the normal modes of action.

Other lists of unusual, sometimes quite bizarre, entities can be adduced to show that the company of invisible members of society does not consist of a finite register of names but is open-ended and can be added to at will. It may be assumed that any such additions or amplifications of the list will have to submit to certain limits imposed by the culture and possibly obey specific rules, but these are not always clear to us.

Much of the effort of the magical compositions is spent on the attempt to get rid of the undesirable entities that lurk around us and to encourage the friendly beings to be more active in eliminating these hostile powers. The analogy in our contemporary world is the treatment given by the medical profession to the invisible entities within our bodies. Certain invisible entities are deemed to be helpful and should be encouraged; others are taken to be hostile or harmful and an attempt is made to eliminate them. The analogy probably shows that the way we reconstruct the invisible (and often also the visible) world is not much different from that of our predecessors. We tend to use similar metaphors for the world, especially for those aspects of it that are imperfectly understood.

One difficulty about dealing with these unofficial members of society stems from the fact that they are not easily recognizable in everyday life. We know and sense that they exist, we know several of their names and characteristics, but when we encounter them, can we always tell who they are? The fact is that we do come across them even though they are in principle invisible. Here is a text that describes situations of encounter:

> [1] Bound and sealed are you, lilith [2] and destructive spirit that dwells in the house of Ayendes son of Rashewandukh, and in the dwelling [3] of Mahdukh daughter of Newandukh, his wife, and who appears at night in the form of a male thief, and calls them [4] at night like human beings and like a female thief, who spoils food and harms children.

> You are bound by the name of [5] Asri'el[5] the angel, who binds and does not loosen, who ties a knot that is not untied. And you are sealed by a rod of fire and by the pebble-spirit of Ganaqat Lilith, and by the ring of [6] King Solomon son of David, on which are engraved all the demons and devs, who tremble and shake and fear from him, and who go away from every single place where it is found and from every single place [7] where it dwells.
>
> You too, evil lilith and destructive spirit, (by the power?) of this amulet, move away, be banished, tremble and go out of Mahdukh daughter of Newandukh, from her house, from her sons [8] and her daughters, from those that she has and from those that she will have.[6]

We have here demons that appear in the form of human beings, and we may surmise that there would often be considerable equivocation and soul-searching as to the proper identity of a human being — a neighbor or a stranger — who is assumed to be a demon. Any vision of a human person under special circumstances, in particular when there is tension and wavering as to whether everything is as it should be, may give rise to the question: Is this a person or a spirit? When a thief comes at night, is he a mere criminal, or a demon? If the world around us does not look right, is this not a mark that something in the cosmic order, beyond human society, is amiss, perhaps something within us, in our close surroundings, or in the spiritual society that accompanies us?

What is the proper technique for getting rid of undesirable entities, and thus perhaps for restoring order in our world? We have seen in the preceding examples one technique, which consists in trying to eliminate them altogether, basically by telling them off. Another technique consists in "sealing" or "binding" them. They are thus made incapable of causing harm, although they are evidently still present and can be visualized as existing around us.

Out of many different texts that display this terminology, I should like to quote one quite forceful passage:

> This ban-spell is [11] true and its seal is fixed on it, so that no one can get away from its ban or jump away from under its authority.
>
> By the name of these ban-spells, may there be bound this evil lilith and the evil spirit that aggrieves this Yona daughter of Mahdukh.
>
> [12] May she be bound in the earth and sealed in heaven.
>
> Again, may she be bound by the lion and sealed by the sea-dragon.
>
> Again, may this evil spirit and evil lilith be bound, whether she is male or female, (the one) who appears to Yona daughter of Mahdukh and aggrieves her, whether by day or by night, [13] . . . in mourning.
>
> Again, may she bound by Indian clay and sealed by canine teeth (?).
>
> Again, may she be bound by the god of heroes (?) and sealed by Aryon bar Zand.
>
> Again, may she be bound by the signet-ring of . . . and sealed by the great load of mourning.
>
> Again, may she be bound by the mystery of . . .

> Again, may she be bound [14] by the knife and sealed by bloodletting (?).
>
> Again, may she be bound by the true lord and sealed by the great ruler who is in front of him.
>
> By the name of [*a series of nomina barbara is given, among which are the words: "Held back forever immediately"*].
>
> [15] . . . This Yona daughter of Mahdukh, may she be sealed and healed from the hair on her head to the nail of her foot. And after that from the mouth [of her abdomen?].
>
> By these angels, may they not come to this place, and may they not approach Yona daughter of [16] Mahdukh and her husband Giwai son of Ispandoi, and not harm her house or . . .
>
> By the name of Ibol, the great lord of mourning, Amen.
>
> [*Magical characters*] Kings. Great.[7]

An elaborate magical liturgy is devised in order to ensure that the unwanted elements be contained within their places by means of banning, sealing, and binding. Not all the expressions used in this text are meaningful to us, but the general tendency and the overall structure are quite clear.

Another popular device for getting rid of the unwanted presence of noxious entities in the house is that of serving them a writ of divorce. It consists of applying to the demons that lurk in the house the legal formula of a Jewish *get*, the document that enables the husband in a patriarchal society to send away his wife and to sever all contacts with her. Although the device seems simple and straightforward, it is based on some subtle but important underlying assumptions.

One has to pretend, for the sake of the procedure, that the demons that inhabit our house are in some sense human and have a legal standing to be here, for otherwise it would be impossible to divorce them. One cannot, after all, divorce a nonmarried woman or a tow-away demon. One has to pretend, furthermore, that the demon is willing to play the game and accept the legal document, for otherwise a divorce would not be legally valid. It is necessary to pretend, in addition, that it is physically possible to hand over the legal document to the invisible demon. This is, again, a *sine qua non* requirement of the legal procedure. Finally, one has to employ the incongruous formula that is used for dismissing a woman. This formula does not say that she is being sent away, or that she is being got rid of as an unwanted person. The language used says that the woman is given freedom to go wherever she likes, and the authority to marry any other person she fancies. This is, significantly, a formula not unlike that for the manumission of a slave. The paradox however lies in the fact that the last thing you would want to give an unfriendly demon is the freedom to go wherever it wants; but this is precisely the formulation of the incantation, because this is the game played by the formula.[8]

The examples discussed so far refer to transformations imposed on the invisible members within human society. These invisible members, we may argue, are at least in part reflections of our own fears and apprehensions, or even of our repressed or hidden desires. The changes we impose on them may therefore be said to be in a

sense changes we are trying to effect in ourselves, metamorphoses by which we are hoping to reform our immediate human or invisible environment, possibly also our inner selves.

The practitioner sometimes has to have recourse to dramatic actions in order to achieve his aims. Here is an example for a shamanic-like ascent to heaven:

> I have therefore ascended [7] up to you to the height, and have brought upon you destruction, to remove you and to expel you from Šilai son of Gušnazdukh and from Nanai his wife, who have released you by a deed of dismissal and a document of abandonment . . . [8] . . . in the manner of the demons and *dēvs*, and in the manner of Jewish women.[9]

The practitioner ascends to heaven in order to eliminate the enemy. In this case the action described forms part of the divorce procedure, but it can evidently be used in other instances as well. The transposition of the practitioner from the normal place that he occupies on earth to the height, which is the presumed place of the demons, turns him into an equal partner with the demons and enables him to impose his will.[10]

We have here and in many other spells a combination of various elements used within the same procedure. One might suppose that the divorce formula is powerful enough to turn the demons out of the house. One might further assume that the help obtained from the friendly spirits invoked gives the practitioner extra strength. It may be claimed that the quotation of appropriate biblical verses adds considerable power to the invocation, and so does the reference to the great figure of R. Joshua bar Perahia, who, it is claimed by the incantations, established this procedure. All of these points are valid, and yet there is always the feeling that none of the means used is sufficient by itself, and that the more tricks one can muster and use, the better the final outcome. Although the language used conveys great power and confidence, the practice, by the fact that it seems never to be content with a single measure, betrays a certain sense of insecurity.

What is the purpose of the incantations used in the bowls that we are reading? The aim in most cases seems to be to achieve an improvement in what we regard as the physical aspects of life. Problems of health and of physical well-being are prominent in the language of these texts. Problems of material possessions are not absent, but they are less frequently alluded to than we might expect, and considerations of social standing, such as social success or popularity among one's fellow human beings, also occasionally receive expression.

Among health problems, the descriptions given often suggest problems that we may classify as connected with mental health, but sometimes a mixture of complaints emerges from the symptoms mentioned. It may be noted, however, that the symptoms occurring in these texts are seldom if ever expressed in terms that would convey a symptomatic meaning to a modern practitioner of medicine.

> [1] May there be healing from heaven to [2] Mihranahid daughter of Aḥat, who is called Kutus.
>
> May she be healed [3] from any spirit of shivering (?) that encircles her face; from the spirit of cataract; [4] from the spirit that sits on her ear and smites the *brain and the overlap from her ear, and they call to her: "*Take and drink!";

> [5] from the spirit of migraine, that sits in her temples; from the spirit of stupor; from the spirit that officiates in the seven orifices of her head; [6] from the spirit of jugs; from the spirit of *drain-pipes; from the spirit of the cemetery; from the spirits of a *child-bearing woman (?); from the spirit of shaking; from the spirit of all blast-spirits and harmful spirits; [7] from an impure spirit; from the evil spirit.
>
> I adjure you and invoke against you that you should not have power over Mihranahid daughter of Aḥat, that you should depart and go out of her and from [8] the 252 limbs that are in her body.[11]

This is a typical text. The malady depicted here seems to be a conglomerate of different complaints that do not add up to anything specific, as far as we can tell. It is however clear that it is caused by the action of demons who have taken residence in various parts of the body of the patient. Healing the patient means ridding her of the entities that have settled there. As in every act of healing, the patient is expected to transform, but in a magical healing of this kind, the change that the patient undergoes is not merely mechanical.

She has so far allowed a whole range of demons to take possession of her, even though it may be taken that this situation did not come as a result of a conscious decision on her part. The action of the healer is designed to enable her to be liberated from this presence and thus to become mistress of her own person again. Disease, a result of someone falling victim to a wanton attack by those invisible members of society, can only be cured by helping the person achieve independence, regain autonomy over his or her body. The words of the incantation, as well as the ritual action that probably accompanied them, concentrated on this mental change that should be effected. By knowing herself capable of resisting the tyrannical invasion of her body by demons, the person has already regained considerable power and a measure of health.

The demons, we have seen, are masters of disguise and of changeable appearance. They appear in different forms and can cause great confusion by the fact that it is rarely possible to be positively sure that one has encountered one. The various indications are helpful; they can certainly alert us to the possibility that members of that other section of society are in our midst. But this is a world of uncertainty. The demons seldom identify themselves by name or by their real attributes. The healer should try to unmask them, and it is necessary sometimes to call their bluff.

Some scenes in the incantation texts are based on this notion. In some cases, by offering the demons hospitality, it is possible to expose them as pseudo-humans, since they do not eat or drink, nor do they sleep (which may be interpreted as meaning that they do not have the sexual attributes and propensities that characterize human beings).[12]

If they have taken possession of a person, it is necessary, as in the last example quoted, to bring about a separation of the demons from the person. The divorce procedure, with all its mock legality, is a strong metaphor for the effort to reconstitute an individual or a family in a manner that would avoid the jarring and harmful interference in our lives of those other entities, the nonhumans.

The magic action underlying these texts strives to bring about a change in the individual as well as a change in society. Those who practiced Jewish magic in this

period were very close in spirit and shared the same background and premises as those of the *Hekhalot* mystics, who can be described as aiming at enabling human beings to attain to the divine presence and to integrate themselves to it. Cleansing human society and the human individual from demonic elements is partly a preparation for that goal, partly an outcome of it.

What does all this tell us about the concept of the person in the culture we are studying? The person seems to be definable, among other things, as an individual component in a conglomerate of individuals, both visible and invisible. While relations with other persons in the visible society can be friendly or hostile, they differ radically from relations with members of the invisible section of society in one important respect. The former type of relations (those with our neighbours and fellow humans) are external; the latter (those with the invisible beings) are internal, part of the constitution of the person itself—the dialogue with them is an internal dialogue. The sum of one's associations with invisible beings is in a profound manner a way of defining and characterizing oneself.

This conception, if it is correct to apply it to the world of the incantation bowls, is very close to that which is attested in Sasanian Zoroastrianism. The attributes of a person can be spoken of, according to Zoroastrian literature, in terms of what spirits inhabit him or her.[13] To change, to reform, means to welcome certain spirits within oneself and to drive away negative ones. There are, it must be pointed out, significant differences between these two conceptions. The spirits, good and evil, that inhabit the person in Zoroastrianism are clearly defined as to their moral function; each of them represents a specific aspect of human character or behavior. The world of the incantation bowls, in contrast, is much less structured. The invisible entities in Jewish Babylonian magic, as we have seen, are not sharply differentiated among themselves, and their characteristic features are not precisely delineated. The manner by which the association of the person with the invisible entities determines its character is as a result much more fluid, much less stable. The association seems more casual, more haphazard, and the contours of the person much less liable to clear description.

Notes

This essay forms part of a series on the poetics of Aramaic spells. Cf. Shaked, "Poetics," 1999; Shaked 1997; Shaked, forthcoming. Closely related is Shaked 1995. An edition and translation of a large corpus of Aramaic bowls, which forms part of the Schøyen Collection, is in preparation.

1. For general information concerning this material, cf. Shaked, "Parole des dieux," 1999.
2. Naveh and Shaked 1987, 199; a variant of this text is in the Schøyen Collection, MS 1929/1.
3. Schøyen Collection, MS 1927/8.
4. Schøyen Collection, MS 1927/20:3–8.
5. Asri'el is obviously derived from the root ASR, "to bind."
6. Schøyen Collection, MS 1927/54.
7. Schøyen Collection, MS 1927/34:10–16.

8. This device is discussed in detail in Shaked, "Poetics," 1999, cf. here author's note.

9. Schøyen Collection, MS 1927/39:6–8.

10. On the phenomenon of ascents in Babylonia in the Sasanian period, cf. Shaked, "Quests," 1999, 65–86.

11. Schøyen Collection, MS 2046:1–8.

12. This point and other examples are discussed in my article Shaked 1994, 4–19, esp. 10–13.

13. Cf. on this Shaked 1971, 59–107, esp. 81f.

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DAVID SHULMAN

Tirukkovaiyār

Downstream into God

The Self as an Iron Puppet

To speak of self-transformation is to assume some notion of self, even perhaps an economy of selves, part-selves, or parts of self. In India, the problem is perhaps complicated by the lack of any terms even minimally analogous to the Western ones: the metaphysical self, *ātman*, is almost by definition not the personal self that might be subject to transformation.[1] Dravidian lacks any such lexeme, unless we wish to resort to various permutations of reflexive forms or to adapted Sanskrit usages. And yet Indian literature of all periods abounds in cases of extreme and even multiple transformations of something we might call a "self." In some cases these shifts and transformations may in fact be said to be or to constitute this self.

But "transformation" is, perhaps, too accessible, even facile, a term. What actually might we mean by it? It is surely not only a matter of form.[2] One looks for something dynamic working within or upon consciousness, a process, however long or short, that has direction as well as other features—for example, regularity, novelty, intensity, potentially stable or substantial change. Various well-known processes, each with its own telos, come to mind as transformative in these terms, from the ancient rituals of heating or "cooking" a divine self into being[3] to the meditative modes of Yoga or *tapas* and the breakthrough to wider awareness said to be achieved by poetic or musical means. In what follows, I limit myself to a small corner of the subcontinent and to a well-defined cultural and linguistic domain—that of medieval Tamil Śaivism as seen in two closely related texts, one from the ninth century, the second from circa the fifteenth. For now I will speak of "self" and of "transformation" as external, analytical categories, without further apology, in the hopes of drawing out more sensitive definitions from the texts, in an inductive mode.

Tamil Śaivism offers a rich program for self-transformation, beginning with the daily *nyāsa* rituals, which are meant to turn the ritual performer into Śiva and also to make this god present in his *liṅga*-form.[4] The two processes are complementary and always unfinished, as one can see by the need to repeat them each day. A so-

phisticated theology is implicit in the Sanskrit Āgama texts that explain the rituals and in the Śaiva Siddhānta metaphysical treatises that derive their authority from the Āgamas. More dramatic narratives of transformation come from the Tamil hagiographic sources, above all the *Pĕriya Purāṇam* of Cekkiḻār, a twelfth-century encyclopedic reorganization of available legendary materials relating to a series of 63 *nāyaṉmār*—the slaves or servants of Śiva. Cekkiḻār usually tells a story building up toward a climax, which propels everyone—the devotee, his family and followers, and the god himself—into a new ontic state. Sometimes the trigger is a form of unbearable or uncontainable paradox—for example, when Śiva asks his loving servant to sacrifice and cook this servant's only child as food for the hungry deity. For the most part, violence is normative in these stories, but generally speaking, the state achieved in its wake is not one of fusing the devotee into the god but one of a powerful connectedness (*sāyujya*), perhaps in another cosmic domain, but with surviving residues of separate identity and personality.

Such distinctions matter, since they also tend to occur in the descriptions the Śaiva poets give of these processes. A considerable literature in Tamil embodies highly emotional expressions of the awakening of self in relation to a possessing but at the same time playful and slippery god. A standard paradigm shows features of disruption in the integrity of self, when the god first infiltrates consciousness:

viṉaiyile kiṭanteṉaip pukuntu niṉṟu
potu nāṉ viṉaiketaṉ ĕṉpāy pola
iṉaiyaṉāṉ ĕṉṉ' uṉṉai aṟivitt' ĕṉṉai
āṭkoṇṭ' ĕm pirāṉ āṉāykk' irumpin pāvai
aṉaiya nāṉ pāṭe'niṉṟāṭeṉ anto
alariṭeṉ ulariṭeṉ āvi coreṉ
munaivaṉe muṟaiyo nāṉ āṉav āṟu
muṭiv' aṟiyeṉ mutal antam āyiṉāṉe

You entered me, awash with deeds,
and standing still in me you seemed to say,
"Let's go. I am the end
of deeds." You introduced yourself
as "So and So" and made me
yours. You are my god.
But as for *me*—an iron puppet,
I neither sing, nor dance, nor weep, nor wail,
nor fail in dizziness. Tell me, is this any way
for me to be? How will it end, you
who become the first,
the last?[5]

This voice, that of Māṇikkavācakar in the ninth century, is the classic male voice of south Indian *bhakti* religion—one which speaks as if from a shattered innerness, in tones of plaintive self-reproach and poignant hunger for the divine persona that has entered the self, *as if* from outside, and then somehow disappeared into the stony depths inside. "As if"—because there is every reason to believe that this seemingly self-assured Śiva-persona, who introduces himself almost casually to the poet and offers relief from suffering, actually emerges from an even more deeply embedded

layer of existence inside him. The experience, judging from the poet's description, is one of being entered, perhaps even "possessed"; but, both here and in more heavily ritualized domains of induced possession and/or exorcism, Tamil sources distinguish clearly between the subjective perspective of the "possessed" and the more general metaphysical proposition asserting that this subject is, in fact, somewhere "inside" the possessing god or demon. As we will see, there is also another, perhaps even more powerful, mode of coming into one's "self," as seems to happen in the verse just cited—a mode that entails a kind of ultimate mutal embeddedness and interweaving of part-selves, including those which are tagged as "Śiva," as well as those apparently belonging to the newly activated human subject.

Always, there is the moment of breakthrough, described as entering and possessing:

aṟivilāta ĕṉaip pukunt' āṇṭukŏṇṭ' aṟivatai aruḷi mel
nĕṟi ĕlām pulam ākkiya ĕntaiyaip pantaṉai aṟuppāṉaip
piṟivilāta iṉṉaruḷkaḷ pĕṟṟiruntu māṟāṭuti piṇa nĕñce
kiṟi ĕlā' mikka kīḻppaṭuttāy kĕṭuttāy ĕṉṉaik kĕṭum āṟe

In my ignorance, my father
came into me,
took me over,
made knowledge present,
made all ways clear, cut
my bonds. But though you hold this sweet
inseparable presence, you keep on changing,
you corpse of a heart: you toy
with me to my shame, you ruin me.[6]

The dead heart can no longer be trusted since it cannot hold on to the richly flowing presence (in the plural, *aruḷkaḷ*) that it has discovered inside itself; but this means the poet is himself no longer whole—no longer "himself"; one voice within him speaks to another, spilling over uncomfortably in the ambiguous syntax in which the god might almost be the "bonds" that this same god has supposedly cut.[7] There has been a vision so intense that the speaker wonders, in the next verse, why his recalcitrant heart has not melted down (*nĕkk'ilai*) or, alternatively, why it has not torn his body into shreds (*ikkāyam kīṟukiṉṟ'ilai*). Note that these are two possible responses to what might be seen as the basic and recurring problem, namely the residual existence of a hard, bounded exterior in contrast to a fluid and entirely alive interior. This problem turns up whenever Śiva enters the person, disrupts his earlier (ignorant) state, disturbs him, sets him on a course of rapid and unsettling transformations. From this point on—actually even earlier, despite the subject's lack of awareness—the god is somewhere inside, though usually not accessible because of the inevitable drift toward an encrusted surface self.

I have used the term "possession" with some trepidation since historians of Tamil Śaivism have been careful to distinguish the rich states of feeling described in the canonical poems from the dramatic ritual modes familiar, for example, from village religion throughout south India. People who experience such kinds of possession (*āveśa*) often speak with an alien voice—divine or demonic—and may lose all

sense of the normative or everyday working self. There are, of course, various degrees and stages in this set of phenomena; I myself have seen supposedly possessed ritualists casually conversing, in their habitual persona, about various prosaic topics even in the course of their ritual performance. With demon possession, this overlapping in voice and personae is even more conspicuous and always takes the form of intense suffering, as the victim struggles to retain or regain something of her former identity: in such cases, the exorcist's art is to force the possessing demon first to reveal his name and then to tell his story.[8] All of this is clearly rather distant from Māṇikkavācakar's subtle verse: yet notice that here, too, the god begins by introducing himself to the victim whose internal space he has suddenly occupied. The really striking difference lies in the *bhakti* poet's experience of loss or absence: once having "met" Śiva inside himself, he is nonetheless unable to hold on to him; failing in this way, the poet castigates himself as a shell, a dead exterior, an "iron puppet." Such disparity or incongruity between the remembered moment of meeting and exchange and the current experience of benumbed, metallic awareness is a diagnostic feature of these poems.

Still, the poems always reflect a living context, which we may have to reconstruct, refashioning the connections to deeply rooted concepts even as we insist on necessary distinctions. Certain key notions cut across otherwise discrete milieux. When the god or goddess swells into full presence in village rites of sacrifice, this is referred to as *aruḷ*—usually, and misleadingly, translated as "grace," when what is meant is a kind of fluid, shimmering fullness, marked by shifting, unpredictable intensities.[9] Similarly, the presence of Śiva within his poet's mind or heart, or, for that matter, in his temple, is always *aruḷ*, insofar as this presence can be said to be active (more precisely, interactive). The root appears as a verb (*aruḷu*) appropriate to a divinity or other elevated personage as he or she enters into movement, action, or some intentional state—or, more generally, as he or she becomes present. It is this presence that is so disruptive to the self-awareness of the *bhakti* poet, and that so often puts in question the potential wholeness of that self.

I argue that self-transformation in Tamil religion is primarily a matter of this *aruḷ*-presence, and, as such, that it is characterized by processes of deobjectification (or internalization, which amounts to the same thing), heightened flux, condensation or intensification of internal processes, and a general "filling up" of the empty or spacious inner self. Experientially, it is powerfully linked to dissociation or disintegration, on the one hand, and to a pervasive interweaving of levels or layers of the self, on the other. In cognitive terms, it is mostly nondiscursive or, if ostensibly discursive, tends to paradox. Nothing leads us to imagine that this kind of presence is ever capable of being stabilized, even for the god.

The Book Hidden on the Threshold

The verses I have cited are taken from the *Tiruvācakam*, "Spoken Words," a diverse collection of songs often seen as constituting the ultimate expression of Tamil devotion to Śiva; as the Tamil saying has it (in a phrase resonant with our theme), *tiruvācakattukkum urukātar ŏruvācakattukkum urukār*: "whoever fails to flow with the words of the *Tiruvācakam* will never flow for any words." In Tamil Śaivism, liq-

uidity is all. The tone of the text is generally vibrant with unrestrained emotion, sometimes hurled with passion at the disturbing deity it celebrates. The poet, Māṇikkavācakar (ninth century), also known as Vātavūrar, from the far south of the Tamil country, was associated in the final stages of his life with the central shrine of the dancing Śiva (Naṭarāja) at Cidambaram in the northern reaches of the Kaveri Delta.

But Māṇikkavācakar also composed a second long work, known as *Tirukkovaiyār*, "the String of Pearls."[10] The 400 verses collected here have an altogether different character than the largely first-person, seemingly confessional ecstasies and torments of *Tiruvācakam*. We now find a form of devotion that is strangely oblique, convoluted, and suggestive. At first glance, the *Tirukkovaiyār* looks like a series of ordinary love-poems, in the tradition of ancient Tamil love-poetry of the so-called Cankam period (first three centuries C.E.). Like the ancient poems, Māṇikkavācakar's use a shared symbolic language based on the conventional division of the Tamil country into five zones, each correlated with a phase or aspect of the love-relationship; within this system, the moments and stages of erotic love have now been standardized in a linear, narrative sequence, from the moment the male lover first sets eyes on the woman until long after their marriage, with its attendant tensions, has been formalized. Despite its apparently more crafted and controlled style and the somewhat bizarre flavor of many verses, this far-reaching reworking of the classical conventions to encompass the relationship between the human subject and his or her god is, I believe, even more revealing of "self-transformation" than our poet's other work.

We will look at a few verses in some detail. First, however, you may wish to learn how the *Tirukkovaiyār* came to be composed, at the end of the poet's life. The story itself enacts all the major themes that concern us. Here is how the later medieval tradition tells the tale, in the concluding section of a hagiographical work about Māṇikkavācakar, the *Tiruvātavūr-aṭikaḷ purāṇam* by Kaṭavuḷ māmunivar (fifteenth century):

> Now,[11] after composing the *[Tirup]paṭaiyiṇāṭci*, the *[Tiruppaḷḷiy]ĕḻucci*, the *Acco-[ppatikam]*, and the *Tĕyvaloka-yāttirai* decade,[12] he [Māṇikkavācakar] was simply living — no searching, no confusion, no special clarity, no misery, no exultation. He had come into the world in order to sing the *[Tiru]Vācakam*, the words of Śaiva understanding that transform suffering, and in order to make room in this world for the five syllables of praising Śiva[13] and for the practice of smearing one's body with ashes. For him Tiger Town (Puliyūr),[14] with the Inner Space[15] where Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali[16] had worshipped, was the true world of Śiva.
>
> Then one day the god who is truth, who dances in the Inner Space, moved by compassion, stood before him: he was dressed like a Brahmin, with triple thread and a (palm-leaf) book in his hands. Vātavūrar [= Māṇikkavācakar] looked in his face, invited him to sit down, and said, "Where do you belong, great master of Veda?"
>
> The god replied, "To the great and fertile Pāṇṭiya land."
>
> "And what brings you here?" asked the poet, very politely.
>
> "God himself has entrusted me with the task of finding you." He was speaking very thoughtfully. "First you worshipped him in Pĕruntuṟai, in the far south; then, without sorrow, you came to Kaḻukkuṉṟu[17] and, from there, to the Golden Hall [Cidambaram], where you triumphed over the Buddhists in disputation. Everyone has heard about this and is happy. There are these Tamil poems you have com-

posed, out of love for the First God who dances in the Hall: I have come here to learn to recite them, to find relief from sorrow. I want to write them down: please recite them for me."

That is what God said. Now the Master who had uttered, with love and deep thought, those innumerable Tamil songs to Śiva, melted inside himself and, joyfully, began to sing the *[Tiru]Vācakam*, full of inner truth. And as he sang, the Dancing God took a palm leaf in his hand and wrote it all down, very precisely. When it was finished, the god, overflowing with feeling (*pŏṅkiyav aruḷinārum*) said: "Now you must compose a *kovai* to Śiva, who has the woman within him, to free the world of sorrow."[18]

So he did; and the god sat right in front of him, writing it down. No sooner was this process completed than Śiva, his long hair luminous like gold, secreted the book away and, in a flash, disappeared. The learned poet was startled: he got up, ran here and there, looking for him, his mind distressed. When he realized who had been there with him—the god who dances in the Inner Space—he began to weep. "Where have you gone?" he cried, falling to the earth, swept away by a flood of wonder.

Meanwhile Śiva, who loves good Tamil, entered the Inner Space and announced to the gods, including Viṣṇu and Brahmā: "Listen to this good poetry that a certain person, a servant of ours, lovingly composed." And he sang the poems. Since God himself had written down this *kovai* work, with his own gentle hand, as Vātavūraṉ sang it out of his own truth, the book is a source of freedom. When Śiva had finished inscribing it [with a stylus] on the palm-leaves, he smeared collyrium over the incised letters to make them stand out clearly (*maikkāppu*). Then, wanting to reveal to the entire world the inner vision of this wise poet, Śiva placed the manuscript of the *Tiruvācakam* and the rest of the volume (*vācaka-muṟai*), rich in truth, on the threshold[19] of the Inner Space, where sages and even gods worship.

Later, the Brahmin priest came there to perform *pūjā* and saw the book. "This book is something new, a godly event (*taivikam*)" he said, his mind turning to water. "All the people of Tillai [= Cidambaram] must be told." He rushed off to the residential quarters of the ancient town and proclaimed the miracle. Amazed, people rushed to the threshold where God had placed the manuscript. They thought about it in their hearts: "Since not even gods could enter the Inner Space where Śiva lives, this (book) must be from God himself. Is it a Śaiva book composed by the Lord, or is it a work of fine Tamil[20] [love-]poetry? We should examine it and see." As they were speaking words full of flowing love and presence, one man went and brought flowers, which he presented in worship to the text. Then carefully he took the book that Śiva had hidden there, untied the strings that bound the leaves together (*cemam nīkkiṉaṉ*), and read out loud the first four sections in perfect *akaval* meter. He recited the 600 Tamil poems beginning with the *Tiruccatakam* [= *Tiruvācakam* 5] and the 400 *kovai* verses elaborating on the meaning of love (*virittav akappŏruṭ kovai*). When he was finished, he read out the colophon stating that Śiva, Lord of the Inner Space, had written down this manuscript at the dictation of the noble Vātavūraṉ.

They listened with their hairs standing on end. They broke out in a sweat, they wept at the words, their minds and hearts were a flood of feeling. "There is no other book about Śiva that shows the way to freedom like this Tamil poetry sung by a man so full of true inner discipline (*īṭṭiya mĕyttavam uṭaiyoṉ*). Can we understand the meaning of this beauty?" With this thought, they left the Inner Space and went in

search of the Vedic poet, Vātavūraṉ, who had disputed with the empty Buddhists and achieved victory.[21] When they found him, they placed the text (*tirumuṟai*) before him and told him what God had done. He heard and, full of love, began to weep. "That my poor songs should be given, with such joy. . . . Was there some former good act of mine in this world, something I don't know?" He was moaning, lamenting, and the loving people of Tiger Town very gently folded their hands in blessing, as they asked: "Please tell us what Śiva did in order to receive from you these musical poems of wisdom about God."

He told them. He was beyond birth, which is suffering. Fiercely happy, they bowed to him. But they still wanted more: "Please tell us what this chain of Tamil poems, sung to the god of Tillai, really means." Vātavūraṉ, our Master, was happy, too. He was overflowing with true understanding about Śiva. "Let us go to the golden Inner Space," he said. "I will speak to you there." He set off for the temple, with the people following out of love.

They came to the Golden Hall, where God is present (*aruḷukk' iṭamāṉa cĕm pŏṉiṉ ampalam*). The people of Tiger Town enveloped the poet on all sides. Then, in front of their eyes, he pointed at the god of Tillai, with its paddy fields and areca groves. "The meaning of this string of Tamil songs—is He," he said and, swiftly entering the Inner Space, disappeared. Śiva, covered with cobras, showed his truth[22] to the poet. Water flowed into milk.

We are truly trapped in hellish confusion, who wander the world in search of prey to feed our flesh, never realizing that our lowly skin, bones, sinews, pus—everything, in short, that makes up the body—are Śiva's own self.[23]

This is *sāyujya*, the metaphysical goal mentioned at the outset: the poet has flowed into God, in a sense, become God. The same potential exists for everyone, as the final verse states simply and powerfully, though perhaps a little pessimistically, given the unhappy failure of understanding that afflicts human beings. One sees at once the lack of any body-soul dualism, for the body is the self of God. At the same time, this self tends toward encrustration. The answer, or the hope, thus lies in liquefaction (Tamil *urukutal*). Like most Tamil Śaiva texts, this hagiography moves toward a veritable ritual bathing—of self in soft and fluid feeling, of surface in innerness, of mind in understanding; existential levels fuse, as if tributaries were mixing into the sea; water pours out of the body's orifices, as tears, as sweat, as language or sound. "Water flowed into milk." Moreover, all of this is defined as *aṉpu*, "love," or, perhaps even more emphatically, as *aruḷ*, "presence." It is also striking that this *aruḷ* is located, in the climax of the narrative, in the Inner Space of the dancing deity, where his presence is condensed into the invisible *liṅga* of pure empty space (*ākāśa*), a nonencrusted, unobstructed, deeply internal mode. This small chamber inside the temple, the *cirrampalam* or *cit-sabhā*, is also identified by the Cidambaram tradition with the open space of consciousness within each individual, the "heart's small [i.e., infinite] inner space."

We can single out the major features of the process the poet undergoes. He has already, long ago, been enticed into the Śaiva way by Śiva himself, in human form, serving as a teacher in Pĕruntuṟai—as a decoy (*pārvai*) is used by hunters, in Kaṭavuḷ māmuṉivar's pregnant phrase.[24] From this very early moment on, a lively mutuality colors the entire progression. Śiva seems to be no less driven than his de-

votee; the two are entwined in a complex net of exchanges and interchanges, which may well comprise the deeper logic of the transformation.[25] Eventually, as we know, the poet will transform himself into god; but along the way the god is also subject to far-reaching internal shifts, acting inside and through Vātavūrar, on the one hand, but also crystalizing within himself into discrete, variously externalized guises. One hesitates even to acknowledge an ontic or existential advantage on Śiva's side of the relation, so deeply are the two submerged within one another. In any case, at the time of the final movement across the border toward *sāyujya*, Śiva is still playing with assumed disguise; as he tells the poet, he has come to learn these Tamil poems in order "to find relief from sorrow." I see no reason not to take these words seriously, even, in a sense, literally.

It is a compelling role or guise: the god as Brahmin scribe carefully records the oral text of a great poet on palm leaves, to make a book (*puttakam*). The book has two main parts—the already composed verses of the *Tiruvācakam*, which the poet must hold in his mind, since the verses are said (by the scribe) to exist in the world; and the work newly commissioned by this scribe, the *Tirukkovaiyār* love-sequence that apparently concludes the whole manuscript, since Śiva signs the colophon explicitly at the end of this work. We have a remarkably precise description of the technique of producing a written text from a supposedly extemporized or improvised oral recitation, including the process of smearing ink into the incisions of the stylus (*maikkāppu*) to make them legible, and the scribe's urge to name both the author and himself in this transition to a fixed written copy. Notice the insistence on the oral nature of the poet's own creativity but also the attention to the instrumental role of a written text in achieving the final transformation, for the poet no less than for the god. As in all Indian stories about scribes in relation to the improvising authors, this one, too, embodies a certain tension between the two modes, oral and written. The elephant-headed deity Gaṇeśa breaks off a tusk in order to record the *Mahābhārata*, as Vyāsa speaks it; the compact between them is that the god will go on writing so long as the poet never pauses. In the course of the 100,000–verse text, Vyāsa occasionally grows weary and tosses off some unintelligible verses to keep his scribe busy—hence the parts of the epic that noone can understand.[26] The Telugu poet Tikkana has a similar pact with his scribe, Gurunātha, and comes close to cutting off his own tongue when he becomes stuck in the middle of a verse (the scribe saves him by recording the poet's cry of despair as the natural continuation of the verse).[27] This latter story is a strong commentary on a moment of literary innovation in Telugu, away from a largely oral style and syntax and toward a fixed, recorded text, with highly complex syntactical features that may be close to normal speech but not to orally improvised poetry. This transition is always perceived as a loss, as if poetic speech, to be true, must remain oral and spontaneous, an unmediated flow from somewhere within the poet's mind.

In our text, this tension assumes a rather different form. Even the poet seems to think that his "poor songs" have come to him from Śiva (he deduces this from the discovery of the palm-leaf manuscript in the temple, written in the god's hand), and there is clearly something both revealing and irreversibly definitive about this discovery, so much so that there is no way back, no way to go on in the daily mode de-

scribed in the opening verse: "He was simply living—no searching, no confusion, no special clarity, no misery, no exultation." The written text precludes this kind of existence; the poet now has to go forward, *into* the god. But even more striking is the perplexity that the citizens of Cidambaram feel as they hear the fixed text of the *Tirukkovaiyār* recited to them for the first time. Śiva could sing these verses to the gods in heaven and be content; he is not, it seems, troubled by apparent contradictions or enigmatic formulations. But the native Tamil speakers of Tiger Town cannot understand the "Tamil" of their poet. They want to know what it means.

And one can hardly blame them. The *Tiruvācakam* is, as we have seen, moving, effective, and relatively transparent; only a petrified heart will fail to flow at the sound of these poems. But *Tirukkovaiyār* is very far from transparency. On first reading or hearing, the poems often baffle, with their jumbled codes, their indirection, their mantra-like opacity. At the same time, as the story suggests, they may be the more powerful trigger to transformation.

The Dangling Subject in the Middle

It is time to look closely at a few verses from this hermetic text. I cannot discuss here the poetics of the *kovai* genre more generally, nor even the more specific framing of this greatest of the Tamil *kovais*.[28] Suffice it to say that these works are nonallegorical love-poems aimed at the god, who is always mentioned, almost as if in passing, but who is not the ostensible hero of the verses (the so-called *kiḷavittalaivaṉ*). This hero reembodies the exemplary lover of the ancient Caṅkam poems; he appears here together with the classical set of dramatis personae in *akam* love-poetry—the beloved (*talaivi*), her mother and her wet nurse, her female friend, the hero's male companion, and, toward the end of the sequence of 400 verses, the courtesan with whom the now married hero consorts. The overarching category of *akam*—the "inner" domain of love—contrasts formally with the "external" domain (*puṟam*) concerned with heroism, war, and encomium. However, *kovai* deliberately mixes these categories, as we will see: *akam* love-lyrics, while constituting an autonomous poetic world, now serve effectively as obliquely fashioned praise-poems (*puṟam*) for the true patron, king, or hero, who is Śiva, lord in Cidambaram or Tillai.[29] Moreover, this very conflation or interpenetration of categories expresses a motivating tension between the overt eroticism of the poems and its extension or displacement into the divine realm.[30] On another level, I hope to show that an isomorphism obtains between the structured processes implicit in individual verses and the patterns of transformative movement in self that we have seen in the hagiographical narrative above.

First, two verses to establish the tone. We are in the first section, *iyaṟkaippuṇarcci*, where, as if by chance, the lover and beloved meet in the natural setting of the hill region. They have already fallen in love, already made love for the first time; their lives have changed beyond recognition. From now on, they will live for one another but, alas, at this point, mostly in various states of separation and loneliness. The lover is about to leave the meeting place, to return to his village. He speaks first to her, then to himself:

If the gods' wishing-stone
or the elixir of life
were to come to us
out of the limpid sea
as gifts of Tillai's lord,
would we throw them away?

How, then, can I bear to leave you,
lovely as a peacock, a wild goose
perched upon a lotus, your eyes
gentle as a doe's? Why this withering
despair? (12)[31]

She's like the Inner Space of God
who set fire to the cities of his foes
when they failed to come near,
who holds a goddess within him,
breasts radiant as buds
of silk-cotton.

If I leave her, I may never
find her again. If I stay
any longer — what shame,
what suffering
I cannot know. (13)

The first, dialogic verse looks straightforward, a perhaps not overly comforting cry from the heart. The speaker is perfectly aware of inner turmoil, indeed leads up to it and effectively frames it by situating the word *cintākulam*, his "despair," at the beginning of the fourth line; in head-rhyming Tamil poems, this is a position of great resonance. There may, however, be a more subtle evocation of turbulence in the images of the wishing-stone and the *amṛta*-elixir, which were churned out of the ocean of milk by the gods and demons, working together. So the love that has been discovered is a kind of churning, ripe with promise and the fullness of elixir, the fulfillment of every wish — not, however, a serene clarity, even if the sea was previously "limpid." We have to bear in mind that the poet is singing to god, evoking his feeling in an erotic key, in a manner that complements and also contrasts with the more autobiographical descriptions we saw earlier (the god's "breaking and entering"). In both cases, the result is disruption, even incipient breakdown. And, of course, if Śiva is in him, how can the devotee go away?

But Śiva is mentioned only tentatively, at the periphery of the main discursive statement: if elixir and wishing-stone were to come "as gifts of Tillai's lord," would the lovers reject them? This god is the true subject of the verse, but he inhabits a space almost outside it, hidden away in a long conditional clause; he is, in a sense, both present and remote in this poem, as in most of the *kovai* verses. Or he might be said to have infiltrated a perfectly sensible, even conventional, *akam* love-poem, thereby transforming it from within and also completely ruining its internal balance, setting up the despair and confusion in heart or mind of which the poet speaks. To the Tamil listener, there is a dizzying sense of a strong message so oddly

encoded, and so tangential in its targeting, that it has lost much of its semantic force. No wonder the villagers in Cidambaram found the work unsettling. Why this subtle play of hide-and-seek?

The second verse, again a simple one, reveals one of the primary elements of the poet's technique, which I will call "concentric embedding." Both syntactically and conceptually, we find a series of strangely embedded levels: the beloved is like the Inner Space, the "empty" chamber for the ether-*liṅga* inside the god's shrine; the god lives there, but inside him is another female being, the goddess who in turn reveals, with her breasts, the glow of silk-cotton buds; the lover, entering his beloved, thus seems to penetrate through all these levels (femaleness bounded by maleness bounded by the female, and so on) to a depth—apparently female—that, having found, he is afraid to lose again forever. On the other hand, he cannot remain connected or, perhaps, present. There is the danger of shame (here: the neighbours' gossip). Even worse is the suggestion, derived from mythic and iconographic registers, of the destructive fire that the god directs at those "who fail to come near." (This is a reference to the burning of the Tripura, the Triple City of the demons, one of Śiva's eight "heroic acts" in the Tamil tradition.) The intimate connection is denied at the cost of fiery attack. Slipping from one embedded layer to the next, the listener soon loses the distinction between inside and out; we see already, at a very early point in this text, a complex mutual intertwining of "selves" by the two implicit partners in this relationship, poet and god. In terms of the process the work unfolds, we might think of a paradoxical superimposition or conflation of asymmetrical levels of experience, these levels inhering in each other, informing and even determining each other, with no clear hierarchical center. Or, given the dynamism of the language, we might think of them as moving or spinning within one another, still rather slowly, but also slowly beginning to accelerate. At the same time, important boundaries are melting away.

One could also describe verses like this as small, intricate traps that are meant to pull the listener into their space, to hold him or her there by means of cognitive puzzles (What is inside what?), and thus to work upon his or her awareness and experience of self. These very dense, highly compacted texts put the mind into a spin. Normally, hearing them over and over, one gets lost in them. Even to restate the syntactic progression in the linear and prosaic form I have used in the last paragraph is to create a false impression of logical transitions from level to level [*She* is like the space that belongs to *him* who embodies the goddess and who burned the cities of those who failed to come near, etc.; *I*—the lover, or is it the poet?—am afraid to lose *her*, or is it *him?* and so on]. Tamil, a so-called left-branching language, produces this kind of embedding very naturally, but this propensity of the language in no way diminishes the disorientation forced upon the listener as circle spins within circle. Moreover, as we will see, the listener's situation may not be very different from that of the god who is the "real," yet at the same time tangential, subject of the verse.

I note in passing one small but suggestive linguistic feature. The final word of verse 13 is either a finite verb or a verbal noun, *ayarkiṉṟate*—"becoming weak, miserable, faint." It follows another finite verb, *aṟiyeṉ*, "I do not know." But the link here is forced, the conclusion dangling uncomfortably, an asyndeton with no clear

subject. The medieval commentator Perāciriyar refers it back to the beloved: she is the one who is suffering, though she is separated from this possible predicate by fully half of the verse. An anonymous earlier commentary, which consistently offers lucid and lyrical paraphrases of the poems, leaves the dangling ending: here the misery seems depersonalized, a verbal process existing in its own right, detached from any specific subject. This kind of fragmented and disconnected syntax is always iconically expressive in *Tirukkovaiyār;* examples abound of phrases detached from any linear sense, adrift in the strong currents of emotive speech. Under the impact of these currents, which seem to alter knowledge of self and the normal relations between language and self, the speaker and the poet who speaks through him have come unstuck.

Sometimes we hear of this very directly, as in the following, somewhat more complex, example of "concentric embedding":

kŏmpikk' ŏtuṅki meyā mañña kuñcaraṅ koḷ-iḷaikkum
pāmpaip piṭittup paṭaṅ kiḻitt' āṅk' ap paṇai-mulaikke
tempaṟ ṟuṭiyiṭai māṉ-maṭa-nokki tillaiccivaṉ ṟāḷ
ām pŏṟ taṭa malar cūṭum ĕṉṉ āṟṟal akaṟṟiyate

Like a peacock
that shies from a lizard
but grabs a snake
  whose bite could kill an elephant
and rips its hood to shreds,
she—
waist worn thin as the hourglass drum
by the weight of her breasts,
eyes gentle as a doe's—
has taken me, crowned
with the feet of god,
and utterly undone
my strength. (21)[32]

We are now in the second section of the book, called *pāṅkaṟ kūṭṭam*—the enlistment of the hero's male friend in the effort to plan a further rendezvous with the beloved.[33] So the hero is speaking to his friend, describing to him the effect of his first meeting with the heroine. He states this result very boldly, in a haunting alliterative phrase, *ĕṉṉ āṟṟal akaṟṟiyate,* that concludes the verse ["utterly undone my strength"]. But again there is some ambiguity about the subject of this final verb; the commentators, struggling to make good grammatical sense of the verse, logically refer it to the woman's vanishing waist, a proper subject for the nonhuman (*aḥṛiṇai*) verb. This produces yet another syntactical anomaly, *māṉ maṭa nokki,* the "doe-eyed lady" who *should* be the subject—for, after all, it is this heroine, taken as a whole person, who has so disturbed the speaker—but who is now left suspended in a syntactical void (anacoluthon) between her own hourglass waist and the emerging reference to the god of Tillai. This may be where she belongs, if we read the poem as a map of the poet's inner landscape.

The isomorphism which I have posited between the experience recorded in these poems and the thematized narrative that contextualizes them must also apply

to the overlapping realms of image and linguistic texture. The Tamil syntax sways, slips, and wobbles in perfect harmony with what is surely the central image of this verse, the hypnotic, swaying movement of the slender snake, or its violent shaking by the peacock.[34] The woman has mesmerized the speaker, inspiring dangerous, even lethal longing, ironically swelling in inverse relation to her slight physical form. Māṇikkavācakar has expanded this trope from well-known classical precedents, such as the following Caṅkam poem:

> As a little white snake
> with lovely stripes on its young body
> troubles the jungle elephant
> this slip of a girl
> her teeth like sprouts of new rice
> her wrists stacked with bangles
> troubles me.[35]

Three features distinguish our Śaiva poet's development of the image from the ancient prototype. First, the Śaiva snake is now located in the middle of a richly embedded series, not dissimilar to the concentric levels we saw in the previous poem. The *kovai* verse opens with the shifting, unstable chameleon, an emblem of external and context-dependent transformation. The peacock fears the chameleon but has no fear whatsoever of the poisonous snake, upon which it feeds; but this same snake "can kill an elephant." All of these animals seem to be projected by turns onto the heroine, although she must have a particular affinity with both peacock and snake (usually a focus of feminine qualities in south India), as the speaker quite explicitly tells us. She has grabbed him and torn him to shreds. What is striking is not so much the violence of the image as the poet's need to confuse us by a zigzagging proliferation of levels, the slight encompassing the huge. Recall the Inner Space, in the heart of the temple, that miraculously contains the god.

Second, this series—or rather, the poem as a whole—has a middle (which, in South India, is not at all the same as a center). As the commentators noticed, everything is really balanced, albeit precariously, on the heroine's waist, so tiny that it may almost disappear or, worse, break under the weight of her full breasts. There is an explicit comparison with the hourglass drum, *tuṭi*, as is conventional in Tamil; but *tuṭi*, as a verbal adjective, also suggests the swaying or throbbing movement that pervades the poem as whole. The woman's waist, *iṭai*, actually *means* "middle," and this midpoint is both empty or spacious or missing, on the one hand, and strangely off-center in terms of the tremulous syntax, on the other. It is tempting to think of this midpoint as encompassing the whole animated series of forms and feelings that emerge from the poet's utterance, and also as analogous to the empty Inner Space where the poet situates Śiva.

Third, as always, the *akam* imagery of erotic love, with all its attendant complexity, is indirectly subsumed by the true focus of feeling, the underlying raison d'être of the entire work—that is, this Śaiva deity who crowns the poet with his feet. The first-person pronoun announcing this relation (*ĕṉ*, in the middle of the final line) actually understates the powerful presence of a highly active subject, who is telling us something of the internal process that has overtaken him. Profound

phonoaesthetic effects simulate this process with sudden alternations between harsh plosives (*k/ṭ*, the shredding of the snake's hood) and flooding liquids (*ṉ/l*, the heroine's full breasts and soft eyes, the hero's loss of self and power). Despite the overt but fleeting statement of submission—the speaker is, so he tells us, bowing at the feet of the god—Śiva is clearly implicated in the entire web of interwoven passions; he is, moreover, firmly situated somewhere inside the empirical subject, in some generative and elusive inner space.

The verses of *Tirukkovaiyār* repay close study. Our poet has condensed into them a modular, expressive system marked by coherent and recurring themes and by consistently repeated poetic devices. The linear sequencing of these themes should not mislead us; it is highly unlikely that we are seeing a singular evolving process with a distinct goal, even if the hagiography we have cited moves toward such a conclusion. Rather, the enormous diversity of well-defined love-situations (*tuṟai, kŏḷu*) suggests a series of variations on the manifold textures of "presence." At the same time, we can sometimes observe something akin to a ritual effect, as if the poet were using his technique in order to conjure or activate the god to whom these poems are addressed—which is another way of saying that the poem is used to activate the lost or distant Śiva part of the self. I will close this section with two suggestive examples and short discussion.

The heroine's female companion is speaking to the lover, exhorting him to make a public proclamation of love leading to a formal marriage; the beloved, she says, cannot bear much more of these clandestine meetings and prolonged absences:

> Monkeys swallow sweet bananas, in big bunches,
> then doze in the shade of the cool, ripening groves
> scattered through *your* hills,
> but for *her*, eyes deadly as spears,
> suffering like those who never think
> of the Lord of Inner Space
> who spears his foes in war,
> what is left of your presence? (250)

Niṉṉ aruḷ, "your presence"—the culminating phrase of this poem—could also be "your love/compassion/empathy." The companion is basically attempting blackmail; her main tool is what the poeticians call *uḷḷurai uvamam*, the "evocation of inscape,"[36] the principle of correspondence between the highly overdetermined images of the external landscape and internal states or features of the actors. She is, then, suggesting that the lover is akin to the egoistic, even predatory, monkey who has stolen the ripe banana fruit, satisfied himself, and then gone to sleep. The poem is addressed directly to the lover: these are *his* hills, *his* monkeys, *his* self. All of this is entirely predictable for anyone who knows Caṅkam poetry; what has changed, of course, is the background, where, as usual in *Tirukkovaiyār*, we find the god of Cidambaram. There is, once again, *his* Inner Space (*tiruccirrampalavarai*), this time occupying a disproportionately large place in the verse, with intimations of the god's ferocious qualities and a suggestion that the languishing heroine may share some of this ferocity. As to *aruḷ*, the missing presence, the fullness of being that has somehow drained away—the poet might almost be engaged in a magical attempt to produce

this state by working on the god's "conscience," evoking his empathy for the suffering that the failure of *aruḷ* has brought about. We are poised, in verses like this one, on the verge of sorcery or induced "possession" of a special type. It is as if the poet were trying to wake up the soporific deity, to shake him or coerce him back into the empty void of his lost self. I note in passing that this verse is nearly all retroflex liquids, a sleepy murmur slowly intensifying to a higher pitch, then a rush of plosives that punctuate the dream.

Since I have once again used the problematic term "possession," it is important to draw in a distinction made with some force in the following poem. We are now in a scene heavy with irony; the lovesick heroine is undergoing treatment by a ritual specialist in exorcism, since her family, who know nothing of her love relationship, have concluded that the god Murukaṉ has entered her and possessed her. The exorcist is performing the rite known as *vĕṟiyāṭal*, which includes ecstatic dancing and divination in the presence of the supposedly possessed victim. She, however, knows perfectly well how pointless this activity is:

> Can those who stay
> heal the sickness
> caused by those who go away?
> What a thought!
> I suffer like those who will not bow
> to Tillai, where God lives.
> To her, my one friend,
> I cannot speak, and I cannot survive
> without speaking. I belong
> with the man from the hills.
> I'll tell *him*
> my cruel secret. (288)

She stops the ritual; she is not possessed—not, that is, if she is in an *akam* love-poem, where the symptoms of her illness produce the entirely ironic and misguided effort to exorcise a nonexisting inner divinity. But, as we know, this is not a standard *akam* poem. A deeper irony informs it: for whatever the state of the heroine may be, there is little doubt that the poet-devotee is sick with love for the god who is somewhere within him; this, in fact, is the "cruel secret" with which the poem concludes. The concentric embedding of which we spoke earlier appears here in a novel form; a lovesick poet assumes the voice of an imagined heroine who actually mentions the possessing god even as she denies that she is, herself, possessed.[37] Who but Śiva can be hidden inside the lonely beloved? The paradox is pushed to a point of such overwhelming dissonance that the speaker actually reaches the limit of language, where she can no longer either speak or be silent. Metapoetic statements such as this are also common in the *Tirukkovaiyār* and may suggest something of what the citizens of Cidambaram were seeking when they asked their poet to explain his enigmatic text; his answer is, in effect, the same that the heroine of this verse has chosen.

We are still very close to a milieu of sorcery and the need for some form of exorcism—so close that the verse could be read, like the former one, as an attempt to force the god back into existence within the speaker's consciousness. This, too, is a

form of exorcism, though it aims not at emptying out an alien presence but at filling up the self from within with a presence that has disengaged: the poet is trying to remove the more inert parts of his awareness, including those that belong to his exterior "shell." If these are eroded or, more properly, melted down and washed away, he will presumably float happily downstream into the god.

Such a pattern leaves us with a continuum stretching from ecstatic possession of the village ritual type, on one end, to "pure" states of erotic love-possession on the other end. In between, we have the rather more tenuous and subtle textures of the *bhakti* poet, who feels the god as an internal persona sometimes overwhelming all others, sometimes atrophied, obstructed, or remote. The experience of blockage or distance, which is unbearable, gives meaning to the poems as a means of repossessing, conjuring, ensorcelling a presence. These poems are less a witness to or an expression of *aruḷ*, in this sense, than a means of generating it. As Vātavūrar tells us in his story, "He" — the god of Inner Space — "is the meaning of the text."

Filling the Self

Let me try to list briefly the main analytical features of the processes we have observed in two analogical registers of the Tamil Śaiva tradition.

1. Tamil Śaivism aims continually at transformation, and the direction of transformation is toward *aruḷ*, a liquid presence that is in movement, unstable, internal, full. Being liquid, it ebbs and flows. It is also characterized by intensity and density of feeling. *Aruḷ* is not so much a feature or trait of the god as his true reality: Śiva is the embedded internal movement, a movement in self.

2. The process of enhancing or seeking *aruḷ* is nonlinear. Descriptions imply complex forms of embedding and a progression through concentric, overlapping levels within self. Conflating the levels of self affects cognition and awareness and triggers change.

3. Embedding in this case implies a far-reaching mutual interweaving of personae, a mutuality built around exchange but also effecting the dissolution of defined (personal) borders. What seems to be outside is actually within.

4. Within this fluid interpenetration, "innerness" itself has prior claims. Externalization, or objectification, destroys transformative potential, emptying out the self. Innerness seems to have a feminine coloring or component.

5. To reach the active but often unreachable *aruḷ* is to conflate levels; the process seems also to require forms of paradoxical doubling and combining — *akam* spills over into *puṟam*, divine and human domains replicate one another, "mythic" fragments become part of a lovers' drama. Discrete codes merge or are superimposed, sometimes to baffling effect. Insofar as the god is available on the surface, one sees him only in oblique or indirect modes. Still, the *akam* conventions are largely subsumed by this oblique presence, hence the dissonance and dizziness built into our experience of the poems. The cognitive content of this experience (and of all those evoked by the text) is somewhat devalued, paradox preferred. One might argue that this whole experiential domain is seen as essentially nondiscursive and in that sense dominated by a singular type of personal relatedness. The subject

melts down, if the process is successful. If it is not, he or she remains dispersed, dissociated, disturbed. More precisely, these two states ebb and flow within one another, minute by minute, every day.

6. A particular notion of fullness comes into play, based on a nonobjectified, spacious openness, like the "empty" setting of the *liṅga* in the Inner Space. The most internal space is most full. This inner space is a site of movement or dance (Naṭarāja dances in this chamber of the Cidambaram temple). Fullness may, however, also *be* the experiential state of dizziness triggered by toying with cognition, treating foreground as background, fusing codes.

7. Such a state is aligned with a notion of producing the god, making him present, thereby filling up the self almost to the limit of semantic space. A major experiential factor—that of incipient distance or retreat—distinguishes this kind of self-induced "possession" from ecstatic types known from village rituals; a clear affinity obtains, however, with the madness of sexual loving, seen as pervaded by separation. The text is often "magical" in a performative sense—an instrument of bringing god into being. It is possible that the *Tirukkovaiyār* as a whole is a ritually potent incantation, slowly cumulating in effect, meant to bewitch the god into active presence.

8. Language and poetry (including musical song) are active means of generating the flux of transformation: they are used to melt down hardened pieces of the self, to conjure up the god, to create *aruḷ*. But language holds within it the same tensions, the same drift toward the external (or the referential), as does the rest of reality, as does the self—as these propositions make clear. "Tell me, is this any way to be?"

Notes

1. Yet in Sanskrit, *ātman* can also serve both as reflexive pronoun and as a convenient designation for parts of the "empirical" subject.

2. Except in those cases when, as Gros has suggested for the Tamil Śaiva poetess Kāraikkālammaiyār, "dans la form est la realité de l'essence." Gros 1982, 109. There are contexts in which Sanskrit *rūpa* or *svarūpa* ("form") could serve for "self." I take up this theme later.

3. See Malamoud 1989, 35–70.

4. See Davis 1991, 58–60.

5. *Tiruvācakam* 5.22.

6. Ibid., 5.32.

7. Similarly with Tirunāvukkaracucuvāmikaḷ's first *patikam*, *Tevāram* 4.1.1: here the poet speaks ambiguously of a pain in his stomach, which might well be the god inside him, although this same god is the force that will heal the illness.

8. Nabokov 1995. Cf. *Tirunĕlvelittalapurāṇam* of Nĕllaiyappap Piḷḷai, *Tārukāvaṉaccarukkam*.

9. See Meyer 1984, 262. For the root, cf. *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*, 190.

10. These two texts together constitute the eighth volume (*tirumuṟai*) of the Tamil Śaiva canon.

11. After a major debate with Buddhist monks, in which our poet demonstrated the truth of the Śaiva path.

12. These are well-known sections of the *Tiruvācakam*.

13. The basic Śaiva mantra, *oṃ namaḥ śivāya*.

14. = Cidambaram/Tillai.

15. The *cirṟampalam* or *cit-sabhā*, where Naṭarāja dances, inside the Cidambaram shrine, before the invisible *liṅga* of ether.

16. The two primary devotees of the Cidambaram god. Patañjali is identified with the serpent Ādiśeṣa, incarnated in the great grammarian and Yogic teacher.

17. In northern Tamilnadu, on the coast south of Madras.

18. Śiva is Ardhanārīśvara, an androgyne.

19. *Ampalattu vāyil vaṇ paṭi*, today known as *pañcākkarappaṭi*, the "*pañcākṣara* step."

20. "Tamil" may mean, in texts of this period, the conventions and rules of *akam* love-poetry.

21. The episode immediately preceding this section of the *purāṇam*.

22. Or his body, *měy*.

23. *Tiruvātavūr-aṭikaḷ purāṇam* of Kaṭavuḷ māmuṉivar 7 (511–515, 517–539).

24. Ibid., 63. Cf. *Tiruvaruṭ-payaṉ* of Umāpati civâcāriyar, 5.5.

25. I wish to thank Kirin Narayan for stressing this element.

26. *Mahābhārata* 1.1 (excised by the BORI edition).

27. See discussion in Narayana Rao and Shulman, in press.

28. See the excellent discussion by Cutler 1987; also Trawick 1990, 25–37.

29. Cutler 1987, 82–91; Hardy 1983, 324–325.

30. See the exemplification of this feature of *kovai* by the *cāṭu/taṉippāṭal* tradition, with reference to the *Ampikāpatikkovai*: Narayana Rao and Shulman 1998, 98–99.

31. I cite the edition edited by Ra. Vicuvanātayyar (Tāñcai Sarasvati Mahāl publication no. 44, Madras Government Oriental Series [Tañcāvūr, 1951]), with the ancient commentary.

32. The translation of this verse is the joint work of Margaret Trawick and myself. I am indebted to Peggy for allowing me to cite this translation, for fruitful discussions of *Tirukkovaiyār*, and for the pleasure of heatedly debating the meaning of many of the verses. We hope to complete a study of this text.

33. This is a very ambiguous category in the medieval poetic handbooks; it is not clear that empirical examples exist in the Caṅkam corpus. Māṇikkavācakar, of course, is committed to a clean narrative sequence in the evolution of the lovers' relationship; hence his need for this stage.

34. I wish to thank Margaret Trawick for this observation.

35. *Kuṟuntŏkai* 119, by Catti Nātaṉār; translated by Ramanujan 1975, 54.

36. See Ramanujan 1975, 108–110.

37. The Tamil myth of Murukaṉ as we find it in Kacciyappar's *Kantapurāṇam* recapitulates this same pattern: Vaḷḷi, the young Tamil heroine, in love with the god and truly possessed by him, is forced to undergo a rite of exorcism to remove him from her heart. See Shulman 1980, 279.

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Spirit Possession as Self-Transformative Experience in Late Medieval Catholic Europe

Les théâtres du diable sont également des foyers mystiques.

Divine and Diabolic Possession

Possession by either divine or demonic spirits is a familiar form of self-transformation.[1] Together with devotional ecstasy, shamanism, trance, and voodoo and Zar ceremonies, possession is included by ethnopsychologists and anthropologists in the large variety of altered states of consciousness, numerous mental states that are "indigenously understood in terms of the influence of an alien spirit, demon, or deity."[2] These diverse conditions and practices enable individuals and communities to reach beyond their mundane bodies and souls and connect with the supernatural, whether divine or diabolic. Anthropologist Erika Bourguignon has counted more than 400 different societies in which such states are acknowledged.[3] Other anthropologists have identified a marked contrast between two types of possession — central and peripheral. In the former, possession is regarded as a positive experience, and the spirits who take temporary hold over human bodies are viewed positively and typically speak through men. In such societies, possession is sometimes self-induced, and the state of being possessed supports the moral, political, social, and religious order. In peripheral possessions, the phenomenon is viewed as undesirable, signifying personal or social pathology, and the possessed individuals are usually women.[4] In cultures where possession is viewed negatively, as "the state of a person whose body has fallen under the control of the devil,"[5] the possessing agents are assumed to be demons, Satan himself, or revenants — disembodied souls that return from the realm of the dead.[6] Societies that embrace peripheral possession, seen as dangerous or non-normative behavior, developed healing techniques to cure and reintegrate possessed individuals by means of established ceremonies of exorcism. Exorcism is an iatrogenic process in which the interaction between the client and

the healer constructs a narrative that makes sense of the client's situation and enables its reintegration into society.

The Christian idiom of demonic possession is obviously concerned with peripheral possession, as the attributes "demonic" or "diabolic" indicate. But unlike many societies that recognize peripheral possession, diabolic possession in Christianity has never become a cult. There are no examples in the Christian tradition of individuals seeking a symbiotic relationship with a satanic possessing entity by means of an established ritual (trance). This characteristic sets it apart from numerous African-Muslim societies that practice Zar ceremonies, from Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Caribbean voodoo rituals, and from Buddhist and Hindu-Buddhist traditions in Sri Lanka, where special dance and drumming ceremonies are orchestrated to invoke both positive and negative spirits to possess individuals.[7] There is, however, an unrelated Christian tradition of possession by divine spirits, part and parcel of Christian mysticism. While in both phenomena "something other is speaking" through the body, the term "possession" has only rarely been ascribed to this latter occurrence. Theologians, mystics, and philosophers, however, have been well aware of the connections and similarities between the two opposite forms of possession.

This essay seeks to problematize and historicize the relations between divine and diabolic possessions in Catholic Christianity. Drawing upon the manifested external morphological resemblances between divine and demonic possessions and on theological treatises that attempted to distinguish between the two phenomena, I argue that both types of possession were expressions of the same quest for self-transformation. I further suggest that the clear distinction between mystical experience (divine possession) and diabolical possession came into being not in the minds and bodies of the possessed persons themselves, but rather among the exorcists, theologians, and inquisitors who feared the individualistic and anti-hierarchical potentialities of ecstatic and charismatic religious activities. Historically, the process of discerning self-transformative experiences and the restrictions on "positive" possession in Catholicism can be traced back to the late medieval and early modern period. Finally, I argue that the muting of divine posession in this period was a gendered development. The ascendancy and popularity of female mystics between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries compelled the Church to determine who could become a "medium" for divine knowledge, and whether women should or could enjoy this privilege. In the seventeenth century, following the processes of redefinition and the redrawing of boundaries between divine and diabolic possessions, attempts by women (and some men) to gain access to the supernatural by means of transcending the self were deemed demonic, and all forms of ecstatic self-transformation were looked upon with suspicion.

The Development of Christian Exorcism

The Christian idiom of possession by fallen angels and unclean spirits is as old as the Church itself and has always been viewed as a state of affliction. In the Bible, demonic essences within the energumen's body were assumed to be responsible for

the violent physical contortions, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, abnormal strength, and other ailments and diseases that characterized the possessed body, as well as for longer term conditions such as deafness, blindness, speech impediments, arthritis, epilepsy, temporary insanity, and permanent dumbness.[8] In a few cases, the possessing agents also demonstrated supernatural knowledge. Speaking through the mouths of demoniacs, they even affirmed Jesus' identity as "the Son of God."[9] Christ drove out demons by the power of his command. His disciples, however, no longer had such power. Jesus himself explained that by "using my name they will cast out demons."[10] Thereafter, the disciples had to invoke his name to heal individuals who suffered from various afflictions. By invoking Christ's name, laying on hands, using holy water, signing the cross over patients, and using ad hoc variations of the baptismal liturgy, later generations of bishops and saints continued to cast out demons.[11] Unlike the power to cast out demons from animals, buildings, or the fields, the power to perform exorcism upon human bodies was not confirmed by ordination. It was a charismatic power, conveyed directly by God.

Until the later Middle Ages, Christianity never developed a clear distinction between natural and supernatural, or between physical and mental causes of demonic possession. It also did not systematize cultic or ritualistic frameworks that defined the shape, form, or length of time of a possession, the precise exorcismal techniques, or the authority of the exorcist. Exorcisms were successful because of the thaumaturgical authority of saints (both before and after their death) and took place in churches and saints' shrines. Two examples from the lives of prominent saints should suffice. In the fifth century, Saint Geneviève of Paris "entered Saint Martin's basilica and cleansed many possessed ones with prayers and the sign of the cross. And some whom the unclear spirits relinquished confessed that in their hour of agony the fingers of Geneviève's hand blazed up one by one with celestial fire."[12] Nine-hundred years later, Saint Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373) also performed miraculous exorcisms. The saint was called upon to heal a demoniac in East Gothland. "In the presence of two trustworthy witnesses," she was instructed by Christ which words to use to expel the possessing demons. She, in turn, instructed two clerics, who, using her orders, healed the demoniacs.[13] As these two examples demonstrate, personal charisma, rather than established tradition or ritual, determined the saints' successful exorcisms. A tacit understanding among demoniacs, their communities, and their healers defined the diabolic nature of the disease, the exorcist's ability to cure the patient, and the saint's success in the enterprise.

Throughout the Middle Ages, diabolic possession was recognized by its external manifestations. It was a physical affliction, and even when it had a psychological component, the disease was first diagnosed by means of its self-evident physical signs. Lives of the saints neither paid attention to specific symptoms nor elaborated on the exorcistic techniques or the physical signs of the recovery. The healing was just as self-evident as the affliction itself.

Possession between Physicality and Spirituality

This "physicality" of demonic possession started to change in the twelfth century. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was the first in a long series of medieval mystics

who were not male theologians, bishops, or saints.[14] Hildegard's visions were therefore examined by the archbishop of Mainz and by a delegation of Pope Eugene III, who feared that demonic delusions, rather than divine inspiration, was at the origin of her experience. Hildegard herself was also aware of the dangers embodied in visions and warned that whoever is inspired by God will be harassed by demons.[15] Together with her male contemporaries, she wondered why "now, to the scandal of men, women are prophesying."[16] "Disclaiming" her devotional experiences, Hildegard therefore presented herself as nothing but a "reflection of the Living Light" (*umbra viventis lucis*) and further compared her visions to heavenly bodies reflected in water. From both Hildegard herself and the responses by the Church authorities, it is clear that they feared that diabolic possession could manifest itself in a totally mental or psychological form, and that the fact that the abbess of Bingen did not exhibit any of the obvious physical external signs of diabolic possession did not preclude the possibility that a demonic entity was controlling her.

Disturbed by her own mystical experiences, another abbess, Elizabeth of Schönau (ca. 1129–1164), asked for Hildegard's advice. Her bishop, she explained, doubted the nature of her visions and presented them to other masters of the church. "Some received the words with reverence, but others did not." Some argued that her angel was a deceiving spirit, "transformed into an angel of light."[17] In her response, Hildegard instructed her young disciple to regard herself as a trumpet who "only renders the sound and does not produce it unless another breathes into it in order to bring forth the sound."[18] Again, the suggestion distanced the female visionary from the content of her experience, disclaimed responsibility, and by doing so restricted its potential threat to the male-controlled hierarchical structure of the medieval church. It also reinforced the possibility of demonic possession as a purely mental state rather than a physical affliction, as well as the dangerous morphological similarities between divine and demonic communications with the beyond. The mystical visions of both female saints were authenticated by the authorities. But in the process, the definition of diabolic possession, which previously had been ascribed almost solely to physical illness or affliction, was transformed; it was now assimilated into a theological discourse concerning the nature of female self-transformative experiences. Diabolic possession was "spiritualized," and Inquisitional examination of personal renown, credit, and intentions, rather than clear external symptoms, became its defining criterion. To be sure, in many cases exorcism was still a method of healing "traditional" possession by evil spirits, and many descriptions of such events continued to be recorded in saints' lives. The process was not one of substitution of a physical possession by a mental one, but of extension of the category "diabolic possession," which was attributed, from the twelfth century on, to spiritual states of self-transformation that required ecclesiastical examination.

Possession and Mystical Experience

The distinction between ecstatic and speculative forms of mysticism in Christianity is well known. While the latter emphasizes the systematic progress toward the knowledge of God through learning, illumination, and contemplation, ecstatic or affective (*affectus*) mysticism values sensory experiences, "passing beyond" (*überfahrt*), and

"unknowing" as the right ways to reach union with the divine without intermediaries (*sine medio*).[19] In affective mysticism the soul reorients or transforms itself "to become what God is," to use William of St. Thierry's definition, to pass beyond itself, to transcend human understanding by denying knowledge and even the self itself.[20] It is love, not Scripture, personal experience rather than learning, that enables the return of the soul to God. Affective mysticism, and with it the spirituality of love, enjoyed growing popularity from the twelfth century on, influenced by the much older tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and by more recent Cistercian and Franciscan theologies. Both men and women participated in this revival of mysticism, but women expended it in extreme forms. Identifying with Christ's humanity, and especially with his Incarnation and suffering, female mystics experienced intense rapture, trance, and ecstasy, levitation, stigmatism, and other bodily phenomena capable of stimulating affective interactions with Christ.[21] Such unsupervised self-transformative interactions, especially when practiced by women, raised suspicion and anxiety among the episcopy.

Affective self-transformative experiences were always personal, and no account of the event could be equated with it. As such, "what really happened" escaped scrutiny; all we have are verbalizations, that is, translations. Furthermore, both morphologically and typologically, experiences of affective mysticism resembled states of demonic illusion, obsession, and possession. In both, ecstasies could be combined with rapture, paralysis, physical weakness, trembling, convulsions, and inability to digest food. It was necessary to develop objective criteria to distinguish the divinely possessed from the demonically possessed, or the visionary and the saint from the energumen. Hildegard, whose visions originally raised theological concern over their source, was among the first in a long series of female mystics of the Middle Ages. With the growing popularity of the new form of affective mysticism by both males and females, both lay (including the Beguines) and clerical, visions, revelations, and other forms of mystical experiences became more common in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Theologians had to address their reliability. Even male mystics who took part in devotional ecstatic exercises warned that such direct experiences were dangerous. Already in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), who contributed more than most theologians to the mysticism of love and affect of the later Middle Ages and had firsthand experience of ecstasy, remarked in a short sermon, "On the Discernment of Spirits," that "it is not easy to discern" spirits.[22] The famous Flemish mystic Jan van Ruusbroec (1293–1318) also explained, in *The Spiritual Espousals,* that individuals who reach high stages of spirituality are likely to be deceived. The visions, dreams, and apparitions they experience are just as likely to come from the devil as from God, and the only guarantee against such false pretenses is reliance on Scripture. When "the rays of the divine light burn so very hot from above and the heart sounded by love is so inflamed from within . . . a person falls into a state of restless agitation. . . . Some persons can be deprived of the external senses by means of a certain kind of light which is produced by the devil. . . . They sometimes have various kinds of images shown to them, both false and true ones," he said.[23]

Theologians who did not share the vogue for affective mysticism were harsher in their criticism and warnings. Responding to the heresy of Guillaume of Hilder-

nissen and his followers, Pierre d'Ailly (1350–1420), a French theologian and chancellor of the Sorbonne, wrote a long treatise against all forms of unauthorized prophecies, condemning both affective spirituality itself and most claimants for prophetic experiences. His *De falsis prophetis* (ca. 1380) was followed a few years later by an attack by Henry of Langenstein (known also as Henry of Hassia, d. 1397) against Telesphorus de Cosenza, a Franciscan spiritualist, whose pro-French eschatological prophecies enjoyed immense popularity in fifteenth-century France.[24] The same Henry also wrote the first systematic guide for the discernment of spirits, *De Discretione Spirituum* (ca. 1382).[25] Analyzing different energies, senses, and human mental activities, Henry said that there are four spirits that act upon these energies: the human spirit, the Holy Spirit, and good and evil spirits. Experience, however, is always unique, personal, and internal, and the precise nature of the spirit that energizes an individual is therefore beyond human knowledge. "It is difficult to discern which motion is our own or else from a spirit, and from which spirit," he admitted.[26] Thus, having identified the need to develop means for the discernment of spirits, Henry failed in his attempt to deliver. All supernatural experiences—whether positive or negative—should be addressed with caution, he warned, and all claimants for mystical experiences and/or diabolic fantasies are suspect.[27] Attempting to develop various possible means of identifying spirits—for example, whether they caused joy (and are therefore more likely to be divine) or anxiety (and therefore diabolic)—Henry remained unsatisfied with his own solutions. He therefore substituted the discernment of internal spirits for the discernment of external signs. Moderate behavior (Latin: *discretio*), he summarized, is the most reliable indication of a spirit's nature. People who are possessed by the Holy Spirit behave moderately, while people who are possessed by evil spirits behave in ecstatic ways and lack moderation.[28]

By admitting the morphological similarity between the two forms of possession by spirits, Henry of Langenstein did not break new ground. Similar fears had already been articulated in the twelfth century, during the examinations of Hildegard and Elizabeth, and by Bernard of Clairvaux himself. Henry's contribution was to write an entire tract on the topic, to apply scholastic philosophical rigor to the questions, and to shift attention from the purely physical manifestations of demonic possession to its spiritual dimension. The bishop or saint who in the past had been called upon to treat a blind, deaf, or epileptic person was no longer expected merely to heal the body but also meant to question the patient's soul. And recognized forms of affective mysticism such as trance, levitation, physical rigidity or insensitivity, bloating, inability to digest food, and ecstasies lost their ambiguous character and were now suspect as deriving from the devil.

Henry of Langenstein's conclusions were paradoxical. While he emphasized the physicality of the discernment of spirits, arguing that a physical mark (moderation) is the safest sign of divine possession, he also contributed to the spiritualization of demonic possession, extending it from a physical affliction to a mental state. But Henry also added his important voice to the delegitimization of possession as a form of positive self-transformative experience. Furthermore, the forms of physical affective mysticism that Henry of Langenstein attacked were not gender neutral. They were the typical manifestations of female spirituality in the period, and Henry's

warning and mistrust of such bodily manifestations put all female charismatic behavior under a cloud of suspicion. As I have pointed out, affective or ecstatic spirituality was based on a personal, emotional, and direct communication between the believer and Christ. It was not exclusively feminine, but it offered learned as well as unlearned women, for whom access to contemplative and intellectual mysticism was unavailable, other means of identification and unity with the divine. Focusing on Christ's humanity—his wounds, his suffering, his death, and his willingness to offer his body as food to feed his followers—affective mysticism resembled women's daily experiences as wives, mothers, and daughters, and their image and self-image as more emotional and less intellectually capable than men.[29] Thus, the attack on ecstatic experiences and the equation of this behavior with demonic delusions or possession was also an attack on female access to mystical experiences and on all forms of divinely inspired mysticism.

Jean Gerson's Theology of Discernment

A few years later, the French theologian Jean Gerson (1363–1429 or 1431), the chancellor of the University of Paris, tried his hand at developing a more coherent method for the discernment of spirits. He published three treatises on the topic, and his *De Distinctione Verarum Visionum a Falsis* (1400–1401), *De Probatione Spirituum* (1415), and *De Examinatione Doctrinarum* (1423) became the standard works for all subsequent writers on the topic. The ability to discern spirits is a charismatic power, exercised only by those who have official duties that require this special help, Gerson explained.[30] As such, this power is similar to the power of saints and bishops to cast out demons from human beings. Echoing Henry of Langenstein, Gerson further explained that "just as no one can recognize that which is of the spirit unless he be of the spirit, so also no one can know with infallible certainty that which takes place in the soul" (27). Gerson's treatises were written *ad hominem* and *ad occasionem*. Referring implicitly to the experiences of Saint Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), and explicitly to the visions of Saint Bridget of Sweden and to Joan of Arc, Gerson admitted that "there is danger here, either in approving or in disapproving of such writing" (28). The exorcist, Gerson instructed, had to question the personality of the visionary, the content of the revelation, and the reason it took place (30). The content of the vision, however, is less important than the personality: "The testing of spirits demands that the person to whom visions of this nature are reported should conduct himself prudently and cautiously" (32). Thus, like Henry of Langenstein before him, Gerson failed to develop an objective method for discerning spirits. And while Langenstein shifted the focus of the examination from the spiritual to the bodily, Gerson shifted it from the occurrence itself to the personal attributes of the ecstatic person. Extraordinary behavior is a mark of pride and therefore always suspect, he said (33), as are curiosity, vanity, or the seeking of reputation (81).

Like his predecessors, Gerson had to conclude his discussion of the discernment of spirits with the admission that similar visions can be produced by both divine and evil spirits (38). "The resemblance of the counterfeit coin to the genuine is sometimes so great that the deception is scarcely perceptible, save by the most skilled" (93). "The gift of the Holy Spirit," and it alone, enables some people to dis-

cern spirits (27). Gerson was conscious of the gendered dimension of his suspicions concerning affective experiences. "If it is a woman, it is especially necessary to learn how she acts," he warned (36). A woman's enthusiasm is "extravagant, changeable, uninhibited, and therefore not to be considered trustworthy," he said. A woman who talks too much about her mystical experiences, or is too curious, is likely to be a false visionary, while moderation is usually a sign of divine inspiration (36–39). Those who "starve themselves by excessive fasting, . . . protract their vigils . . . weeping almost all the time" are likely to be under the influence of demonic illusions, he concluded (87). Not surprisingly, these were the typical external manifestations of affective (and more often than not feminine) spirituality of the late Middle Ages. What was implicit in Henry of Langenstein's treatise, namely the gendered aspect of suspicions about ecstatic mysticism, became explicit in Gerson's writings on the topic. The discernment of spirits was incapable of establishing any clear and self-evident criteria with which one could tell the divinely possessed from the energumen. But in its attempts to develop such a method, the Catholic Church nevertheless systematized its theology of possession. Women who in the past had practiced devotional ecstasy and had enjoyed clerical support and lay popularity were now silenced and exorcised rather than recognized as divine mediums. Divine possession as a form of affective self-transformation all but lost its legitimacy, and the possession of mortals by good spirits was all but ruled out. Interestingly, the silencing of divine possession was articulated in the language of demonic possession, and at this time the term "possession" acquired its negative connotation.

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce these theological developments to a misogynist attack by male clerics on female mystics. It is important to remember that female mystics themselves, including Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena—the same women whose experiences initiated Gerson's involvement in the discernment of spirits—also expressed doubts concerning their own experiences. In fact, they initiated the suspicion. "Because of my frailness and the devil's cunning I am always afraid, thinking that I may be deceived," lamented Catherine of Sienna.[31] Similar fears were recounted in the biographies of Bridget of Sweden and Joan of Arc, and in biographies of fellow female mystics.[32]

Discerning Spirits in Late Medieval Spain

Theological attempts to discern spirits continued throughout the following two centuries. A few years after Gerson, the theologian and mystic Denis the Carthusian (1402/3–1471) repeated in his *De discretione et examinatione spirituum* of 1459 Gerson's observations and warnings.[33] Another attempt, by the Spanish Franciscan friar Martin de Castañega (1529) was no more successful than the preceding ones. Castañega, however, widened the scope of the questioning. In addition to discerning good and evil spirits, he was also troubled by the need to develop means of discerning natural and demonic affliction and argued that some natural diseases (especially mental illnesses) can be misdiagnosed as demonic possession. Women, who are mentally weaker than men, are more likely to confuse demonic possession and natural illnesses, he argued.[34] Women are also more likely to fake divine or diabolic possessions when they collaborate with conjurers who sign pacts with the devil.[35]

Both Henry of Langenstein and Jean Gerson wrote in response to specific events. Similarly, the date of Castañega's attack on women's claims to supernatural spiritual experiences was hardly coincidental. The early years of the sixteenth century witness the growing popularity of the *Alumbrados*, or the Illuminism phenomenon in the Iberian Peninsula, especially in Castille. Due in part to the inability of converts from Judaism to find their place within the established Catholic Church, as well as to Rhino-Flemish mystical traditions and to Erasmian (and maybe Lutheran) influence, in the late Middle Ages and during the first half of the sixteenth century many spiritually inclined believers developed new forms of religiosity that emphasized personal interior experiences and raptures. They emphasized salvation through self-transformation by means of direct communication with the divine and underemphasized the role of mediation and the sacraments of the Catholic Church. In 1525, the Inquisition published its first edict against the movement, and its attacks intensified in the following hundred years.[36] The Inquisitional effort was judicial, not theological. Its agents did not advance the theological understanding of the problem of diagnosing spirits beyond Gerson and his contemporaries. But its systematic examination of suspicious spiritual occurances led to dramatic changes. Forms of Dominican and Franciscan female spirituality that had been approved and even encouraged prior to 1520, especially during the cardinalship of Ximénez Cisneros, were now reviled as dangerous and heretical. Women who had been regarded as charismatic teachers, prophetesses, and mystics were now viewed as heretics and witches and, often, as diabolically possessed.[37]

Magdalena de la Cruz was a prime example of the new attempt to restrict female ecstatic mysticism. This Cordoban nun (1487–1560) was renowned for her prophetic supernatural capabilities. Christ himself, the Virgin, and numerous saints appeared to her in her visions, and she was also known to perform miracles. Her devotees included dignitaries of the church, among them the archbishop of Seville and the Inquisitor General, and she was honored by Queen Isabel and her grandson Emperor Charles V. But in 1543, following an illness, she was put on trial, accused of faking her ecstasies and trances. Magdalena de la Cruz confessed that for more than fifty years, since she was seven years old, she had been possessed by the evil spirit Balban. Magdalena de la Cruz was sentenced to perpetual seclusion in a convent.[38]

But the judges of the Inquisition were not the only ones who were suspicious of mystical experiences and worried about how to identify spirits. As we have already noticed, female mystics themselves shared the fear and doubts concerning the identities of their possessing agencies or the nature of their experiences. Drawing on her own mystical experiences and her confrontation with the Inquisition, Teresa of Avila lamented: "The devil makes good use of the imagination in practicing his surprises and deceptions, and there are many such which he can practice on women, or on unlettered persons, because we do not understand the difference between the faculties and the imagination, and thousands of other things belonging to the interior life."[39] In her writing, the saint warned her followers to resist visions and ecstasies, and to pursue only moderate and carefully graded spiritual exercises. "I counsel the prioress to make every possible effort to prevent nuns from spending long periods" in states of ecstasy, she advised.[40] "It is always good that we walk with fear and caution," she wrote in her "*Life*." "For, although the work may be from

God, the devil at times can transform himself into an angel of light; and if the soul has not a great deal of experience, it will not discern the devil's work—and, in fact, it must have so much experience that it needs to come close to the very summit of prayer in order to have such discernment."[41] Her followers should follow the saint's own caution: "It has often happened to me that if I have some doubt, I do not believe what is spoken to me and think that I imagined the words."[42]

Teresa's contemporary, the Spanish theologian Diego Pérez de Valdivia, admitted in his 700–page guide to female lay mystics (*beatas*) that "no vision can be absolutely certain," and he, too, encouraged spiritually inclined women to resist mystical encounters.[43] Women, agreed Teresa and Pérez de Valdivia, are more likely to be deceived by demons, and to mistake diabolic delusions for divine visions.[44] Female mystics found themselves between a rock and a hard place. Restricted education prevented them from reaching divine inspiration by means of speculative mysticism, and they had to rely on divine enthusiasm or inspiration to achieve religious self-transformation. But the techniques and means that characterized such ecstatic interactions with the divine were themselves placed under suspicion. While Teresa was especially hostile to inducing visions by excessive mortification, fasting, and spiritual exercises, Pérez de Valdivia blamed visions on lack of mortification.[45] The nun, not to mention the lay woman, had to choose between two options that were both regarded as possible indications of diabolic, rather than divine, influence.

Two parallel and related processes thus reshaped the theological understanding of possession in the sixteenth century. Demonic possession was now regarded not merely as a physical affliction caused by evil spirits but rather as a state of being deceived and deluded by demons. And exorcism was no longer merely a healing method but, in addition, a mechanism for discerning the true nature of human souls. Simultaneously, a demonization of affective and bodily spirituality discredited self-transformation by means of physical "passing beyond."

Girolamo Menghi's Guidelines for Exorcists

Similar developments were taking place in other parts of Catholic Europe. In Italy, lay prophecy from the mouths of "Piazza Prophetesses" and "Living Saints" became very popular in the fifteenth century. Holy figures such as Catherine of Siena, Francesca Romana (1384–1436), Columba of Rieti (1467–1501), Catherine of Genoa (1446–1510), and many less-known lay and religious women became spiritual guides to both laity and clergy, initiated reforms of their local churches, and used visions to advise clerics and rulers. Various forms of female divine inspiration by means of ecstasy and paramystical phenomena such as trance and levitation became exceptionally widespread in Italy in the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth. Prophetesses, visionaries, and "Living Saints" operated in many cities, acquired followers, and challenged established boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy.[46] These forms of lay spirituality posed a special threat to the Church in the sixteenth century. Living Saints were women, mostly members of the laity, and the influence they had over their followers meant a disruption of the accepted patterns of relations between the sexes and the established hierarchical order of the Church.[47] By offering direct channels to divine inspiration and revelation, these women's messages

paralleled the criticism of the Church by the new reform movements, that penetrated the peninsula from the north. Furthermore, like witches, late medieval Italian female mystics flew through the air, had visions, levitated, revealed secrets, and even passed through closed doors.

Recovering from the Great Schism of the later Middle Ages and confronting the Reformation, the sixteenth-century papacy was struggling to reassert its temporal and spiritual powers and to restrict mystical and unsupervised attempts to reform the Church. In 1516, the Fifth Lateran Council ordered bishops to investigate all claims of prophetic knowledge. The Roman Inquisition was established in 1542, the Council of Trent opened three years later, and the Sacradotale Romanum was assembled in 1554. The time had arrived for a methodical construction of Church teaching concerning sainthood, visionary activity, love-induced ecstasy, mystical experiences, and the role of the laity in the Church. Italian spiritual directors of the female "Living Saints" and the Church authorities had to devise techniques to discern spirits and to analyze mystical phenomena. Like their predecessors in the late Middle Ages, their safest guarantee against fakery or demonic delusions was the narrowing down of possibilities by doubting *all* female mystical experiences. Following Gerson, "moderation" was therefore becoming the key concept in the discernment of spirits, and forms of ecstatic spirituality were discouraged and then expiated.[48]

The most prolific and popular among all the many sixteenth-century Italian theologians who addressed the issue of possession was Franciscan Girolamo Menghi (Hieronymus Mengus, 1529–1609). In a series of books, Menghi instructed exorcists how to diagnose true diabolic possession, how to confront the demons, and how to cast out evil spirits. To be sure, Menghi's main concerns were witchcraft and maleficent possession, and his guides were manuals for the practicing exorcist. But he also paid attention to the purely theological or philosophical issue of the discernment of spirits. Because of the popularity of his books, his opinions are worth examining. Menghi's *Compendio dell'arte Essorcistica* (Bologna, 1576; Latin edition under the title *Compendium artis exorcistae* [Bologna, 1580]), *Flagellum Daemonum* (Bologna, 1577), *Fustis Daemonum* (Bologna, 1584), and *Fuga Daemonum* (Venice, 1596) were all reprinted numerous times in pocket editions, suitable for itinerant exorcists.[49] Indeed, practicing exorcists who were brought before Inquisitional tribunals for abusing their power claimed in their defense that they had acted exactly as Menghi instructed in his books. Some even arrived at the courthouse with copies of Menghi's guides.[50] Two of Menghi's guides were then incorporated into the *Thesaurus Exorcismorum*, the 1272–page official guide for exorcists (Cologne, 1608; 1622).

Menghi had numerous goals in his book. He wanted to systematize exorcism and to compile a vernacular guide for the practicing exorcist that included all the canonical rituals. His scholarly effort was also part of the post-Tridentine attack on superstitions and local traditions (including exorcismal traditions). Menghi's books created clear boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate forms of exorcism. At the same time, he was arguing against new voices, the voices of Reformers, physicians, and skeptics, who denied the reality of demonic possession, of witches and witchcraft, and who attributed all diseases to natural causes.[51] His systematization of exorcism therefore also included attempts to distinguish the natural and supernatural etiology of disease; to explain the relations between demonic possession and

witchcraft; and to enter a theological discussion on whether Satan possesses humans with or without God's permission, issues that were hotly debated in the second half of the sixteenth century.[52]

Menghi required the exorcist to be able to distinguish natural from maleficent symptoms of possession. But, like Gerson before him, Menghi admitted that to diagnose the etiology of disease is a difficult task, and that the same illness can arise from both natural and unnatural causes. But physicians, he argued, cannot heal energumens, whose afflictions are supernatural. The matter is further complicated because of the similarities between divine and demonic possession. From a historical-theological perpective, the parallels between morphological signs of both forms of possession are not surprising, he reminded his readers. Demons, after all, are fallen angels, and as such possess all the powers and attributes of good angels.[53] Like angels, possessing demons can prophesize the future, reveal secrets, and understand and speak foreign languages.[54] But unlike angels of light, who penetrate the soul, evil spirits possess only the body and not the soul of their victims. Another distinction between the two types of angels is the undeniable fact that demons lack the power to perform miracles. Finally, while good angels possess people for the glory of God and induce good feelings, fallen angels harm and cause pain.[55] Given the subjective nature of the first and second distinctions Menghi draws, it is interesting to note that the only practical advice the Italian Inquisitor had for his disciples was to examine the bodies, rather than the souls, of the possessed, and to look for clear signs of physical pain, such as stomach aches. Confession is a known remedy for possession-related pains, he said. Therefore, if confession reduces the aches, the patient is, indeed, possessed by evil spirits, and the exorcist can set himself to work.[56]

As we can see, Menghi failed to solve the theological problem of recognizing spirits. He did, however, contribute to the systematization of exorcistic practices and to the growing understanding in late sixteenth-century Italy that what looks like possession is, indeed, possession, and that its diabolic nature is beyond doubt. By attributing bodily manifestations of possession to a demonic maleficium, and by associating this phenomenon with harm-inflicting witchcraft, Menghi contributed to the demonization of possession, which led to the erasure of physical forms of divine possession, and to the growing belief that female witches are beyond most occurrences of diabolic possession.

The Muting of Divine Possession

My last example for the delegitimation of divinely inspired possession in early modern Catholicism derives from France. There, as in Spain and Italy, the growing suspicion of female expressions of affective spirituality led to a redefinition of demonic possession and to the erasure of divinely inspired possession. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church in France supported, encouraged, and propagated cases of demonic possession in which the possessing demons revealed their true identity as agents of Satan and his disciples, the Huguenots.[57] Very few French theologians bothered in this period to participate in the all-Catholic discussion concerning the etiology of possession. One of the few to voice his opinion was the humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, who explained in 1513 that "ecstasy is a de-

parture of the mind from the body and a kind of calling of it away from it, so that some spiritual sight may be perceived. In the good this is done by good spirits and in the evil, the curious and the deluded, by evil spirits."[58] As this quote makes clear, the Picard humanist did not advance the theological debate concerning the discernment of spirits, and although he relied on his reading of Scripture itself, rather than on Church tradition, he ended up repeating Gerson's conclusions.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, a number of young women and a few men who experienced visions and claimed interaction with the divine were defined as diabolically possessed and were therefore exorcised rather than listened to. Nicole Obry was a sixteen-year-old girl when, in 1565, she first encountered the spirit of her deceased grandfather, who asked her to fulfill some vows he had not kept due to his sudden death. Nicole's family, the local priest, and neighbors all authenticated the grandfather's recollections as they were voiced to Nicole during the apparition. Nicole had additional apparitions and visions in the following months, and a special Mass was even celebrated in Nicole's village to mark her spiritual visionary capability. It was only after a long interrogation by the local bishop and intervention by a Dominican friar that the authorities determined that Nicole was, in fact, possessed by demons and that her alleged apparitions and visions were diabolic delusions.[59] Françoise Fontaine, a servant girl from Louviers, was diagnosed as possessed by evil spirits in 1591. But her supernatural experience started, in fact, three years earlier when she encountered the ghost of her deceased uncle. He, like Nicole Obry's grandfather, asked her to fulfill religious vows on his behalf.[60] Both Nicole and Françoise had no reason to suspect that their possessing agencies were demonic. After all, did not French theologian Noël Taillepied express the traditional view that "when the spirits that appear to us command us to perform good deeds, it is probable that these are wandering souls or good and saintly spirits"?[61] Nicole and Françoise still adhered to a tradition that respected and trusted such divine visionary experiences by unlearned men and women. But the theological notions of what constitutes an ecstatic experience and of who has the privilege of enjoying it had shifted. Nicole's and Françoise's bodies, rather than their souls, were now assumed to tell the truth about their experiences, and their bodies unveiled a truth different from the one told by the girls' souls. The girls' seizures, pains, and involuntary catatonic relapses became, by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, clear and unambiguous marks of the demonically possessed female body.

Following the pacification of the country with the publication of the Edict of Nantes in 1598, the political use of demonic possession as a form of religious propaganda lost its appeal. The following year, a major debate erupted in Paris between physicans and theologians concerning the false demoniac Marthe Brossier. Exorcism of this young woman became a theatrical performance that drew large crowds and threatened the peace between the Catholics and the Huguenots. Brossier was arrested and was examined by theologians and doctors, who agreed, almost unanimously, that she was faking her possessions. Responding to a physician's claim that the young Brossier was ill, rather than possessed by the devil, the French theologian Pierre de Bérulle, the founder of the Order of the Oratory (1575–1629), came to the defense of possession and exorcism.[62] Writing in 1599 under the pseudonym Léon d'Alexis, Bérulle described the long history of demonic possession. Comparing de-

monic possession to the Incarnation, he explained that the mystery of the Incarnation served Satan as the model for diabolic possession, hence the similarity between these events: "In one it is God, in the other it is a demon, [who are] reclothed by human nature."[63] Like other theologians who preceded him in attempts to discern spirits, he warned that possessing demons often disguise themselves in the form of natural or "ordinary" illnesses such as epilepsy and lunacy.[64] But he, too, admitted that the devil's "essence is spiritual and his residence invisible." Therefore, the devil's coming and going, or the reasons he chooses to attack a specific persons, cannot be explained.[65] The exorcist still could not, in fact, discern the nature of the possessing agency, nor could he discover the etiology of the demoniac's behavior.

This was also the conclusion of the Minim brother (soon to become a Protestant professor of philosophy) Claude Pythois (1596–1676), who advised exorcists to consult with physicians, with people who know the energumen and her reputation, and to warn the patient against simulation. Pythois distinguished between sufficient and insufficient signs of diabolic possession. Ambiguous physical behavior such as convulsions, rigidity, extraordinary facial or bodily contortions, meaningless babbling, and prolonged silences, which had previously been signs of possession by either divine or diabolic entities, were now viewed as clear but insufficient tokens of demonic possession. Mental states such as rage, blasphemous utterances, and repulsion from sacred symbols—signs that some theologians had previously deemed sufficient—were also viewed by the French theologian as insufficient. Only the ability to speak unfamiliar languages (xenoglossy), to exhibit knowledge above one's learning, to discover secrets, and to exhibit supernatural corporal strength were, according to Pythois, uncontested signs of demonic possession.[66] These marks, alas, still overlapped to a large degree with the clear tokens of affective mysticism.[67] They were also marks of melancholy, the mental illness that so intrigued Renaissance scholars and physicians.[68] (From this time on, this new and competing discourse of melancholy and mental health was to escort, and finally overshadow, the theological discourse of possession.) Pythois concluded, therefore, by conceding that the ability to discern spirits is a "*grace gratuite*" that God gives to some exorcists and not to others.[69] This, as we remember, was also Jean Gerson's conclusion 200 years earlier.

With Pythois and his seventeenth-century contemporaries, the process of the delegitimization and final erasure of divine possession as a form of positive self-transformative experience was completed. Admittedly, theologians still addressed the issue in their writings, and some female ecstatic mystics still had their experiences authenticated. But the *Thesaurus Exorcismorum* of 1608 limited the exorcists' ability to maneuver and to approve ecstatic forms of possession, while the new rules for canonization of saints, which were put into effect between the establishment of the Congregation of Sacred Rites and Ceremonies in 1588 and the papal bull *Coelestis Hierusalem cives* of 1634, consolidated the papal authority to canonize saints. These publications systematized new diagnostic procedures, regulations, and Inquisitional methods for both possession and sainthood. Together, they made the approval of divine possession by means of ecstatic techniques all but impossible. The new canonization process was intensely legalistic and required written evidence to substantiate claims for sanctity.[70] It also prevented canonization by popular or communal pressure. "Virtuous Heroism" was reemphasized as a precondition

for sainthood, and the successful performance of healing rituals or other traditional forms of establishing sanctity were no longer sufficient. Heroism was achieved in missionary activity across the oceans but also, closer to home, by martyrdom in Protestant territory. Proof of a struggle against the devil was also a clear sign of heroism, as was resistance to excessive spiritual behavior.[71] In both the examination of diabolic possession and the examination of candidates for canonization, very careful scrutiny and a systematic analysis of symbolic gestures, signs, and speech acts were introduced. In hindsight, the similarities between these two systems of definition and approval are astounding. Given the iatrogenic nature of exorcism as a process in which interaction between the energumen and the possessed creates the confabulation—that is, the narrative that makes sense of the events—the shift in theological understanding of possession eliminated, by the seventeenth century, the ambiguity that had in the past characterized forms of divine ecstasy.

Notes

1. The epigraph is from De Certeau 1970, 12.
2. Crapanzano 1987, 12.
3. Bourguignon 1965.
4. Lewis 1971; Lewis 1989; Boddy 1994, 410.
5. Jensen 1967, 839.
6. Bourguignon 1973; Crapanzano and Garrison 1977.
7. Bastide 1978; Boddy 1989; Bourguignon 1976; Crapanzano 1973; Crapanzano 1980; Kapferer 1983; Obeyesekere 1981; Wafer 1991.
8. See, among many examples, Luke 9.39, 11.14, 13.11–16; Mark 1.23–26, 1.32–34; Acts 10.38, 19.12. The literature on possession in the time of Jesus is immense. See Langton 1949, 151–172; Rodewyk 1963, 7–45; Van Dam 1970: Böcher 1972; Kelly 1974.
9. Mark 3.11, 5.7–8; Matthew 8.29ff.
10. Mark 16.17; Matthew 8.16, 10.1.
11. Franz 1960, 586–615; Kelly 1974, 72–83; Brown 1981, 106–113; Dinzelbacher 1989.
12. *Vita Sanctae Genovefae* 44; translation from McNamara and Halborg 1992, 34.
13. Brigitta of Sweden 1990, 88.
14. Alphandéry 1932; Vauchez 1990, 577.
15. Newman 1985, 171–174; Clark 1992, 72–77.
16. Newman 1985, 171.
17. Elizabeth of Schönau 1882, 217.
18. Hildegard of Bingen 1882, 216; Kerby-Fulton and Elliott 1985, 222.
19. Jantzen 1995, 138–140.
20. Verdeyen 1978, 175.
21. Vauchez 1981, 439–446; Bynum 1982, 170–262; Bynum 1987; Bell 1985; Beckwith 1993.
22. Bernard of Clairvaux 1854, 602.
23. Van Ruusbroec 1985, 88–89.
24. Zemb 1925, 2574–2576.
25. Langenstein 1977; Heilig 1932; Vauchez 1990, 582–586.
26. Langenstein 1977, 54.
27. Ibid., 58–60.
28. Ibid., 66. Cf. the excellent discussion in Caciola 1994, 345–353.

29. In addition to the literature in n. 21, see Bynum 1991, 119–150; Vauchez 1981, 472–479; Vauchez 1987, 189–202, 239–275; McKendrick and MacKay 1991, 93–104.

30. Boland 1959, 26. In the text that follows, page numbers in parentheses refer to this source.

31. Catherine of Siena, *Epistolario di Santa Caterina*, letter 97, quoted in Bell 1985, 22.

32. Brigitta of Sweden 1990, 77–78, 85–87, 94; cf. additional examples in Christian 1981, 188–203; Kieckhefer 1984, 174–177; Warner 1981, 90–106; Barstow 1986, 21–34; Vauchez 1987, 277–286.

33. Denis the Carthusian 1913, 265–319.

34. Castañega 1946, 37–39, 146–149.

35. Ibid., 123–144.

36. Guilhem 1979, 197–240; Pérez 1985, 43–55; Stoichita 1995, 8–24.

37. For individual cases, see Imirizaldu 1977; Christian 1981, 188–191; Bilinkoff 1989, 55–66; Kagan 1990; Kagan 1991, 105–124; McKendrick and MacKay 1991, 93–104; Weber 1993, 221–234; Stoichita 1995,122–162.

38. Related documents, including the trial records, are reproduced in Imirizaldu 1977, 31–62. Cf. Lea 1890, 330–336.

39. St. Teresa, "The Interior Castle," 5.

40. St. Teresa, "Foundations," 6. Cf. "Interior Castle," 2:4; 3:11; 6:2. Cf. Weber 1990, 142–148; Slade 1995.

41. St. Teresa, "Life," ch. 14; cf. 25, 31, 33.

42. Ibid., ch. 25.

43. Pérez de Valdivia 1977, 334; cf. Weber 1993, 221–234.

44. St. Teresa, "Life," ch. 12.

45. Pérez de Valdivia 1977, 115.

46. Niccoli 1979, 500–539; Zarri 1996, 245–247, and many examples in n. 167 there.

47. Zarri 1990; Zarri 1991, 219–303.

48. Zarri 1996, 238; cf. Zarri 1990; Zarri 1991, passim; Schutte 1996.

49. Romeo 1990, 109–168.

50. O'Neil 1984, 74; Romeo 1990, 122–127.

51. Menghi 1579, 114–116.

52. Menghi 1579, 353–357; 449–452; O'Neil 1984, 53–83; Gentilcore 1993, 134–155.

53. Menghi 1579, 1; Menghi 1593, *Flagellum*, 5–6; Menghi repeats St. Bernard's teachings on the issues. See Bernard of Clairvaux 1854, 602.

54. Menghi 1579, 19–39, 146–147. On the devil's ability to foreknow the future, see St. Augustine 1955, 415–440.

55. Menghi, *Fustus*, 1593, 27–29; 39–45.

56. Ibid., 1593, 50–60.

57. Venard 1980, 45–60; Walker 1981, 19–42; Walker 1982, 237–248; Pearl 1985, 241–251; Pearl 1989, 286–306.

58. Lefèvre d'Etaples 1513, aiv°; Rice 1972, 317.

59. Boulaese 1578; Sluhovsky 1996, 1039–1055, and additional bibliography there.

60. Bénet 1883, 15–20.

61. Noël Taillepied, *Psichologie ou Traité del'Apparition des esprits* (Paris, 1588), 289; quoted in Delumeau 1976, 167–168.

62. Marescot 1599; Congnard 1652; Dagens 1952, 153–160; Mandrou 1970, 163–179; Ferber 1991, 59–83.

63. D'Alexis 1599, fol. 39; cf. 14.

64. Ibid., 82.

65. Ibid., 81.

66. Pythois 1621, 16–20. His list overlapped to a large degree the marks of demonic possession offered by the Italian theologians Thyraeus 1598, 60; Polidoro 1587, 7; and Menghi, *Flagellum*, 1593, 17–20.

67. Cf. Acts 2.13.

68. Burton 1941, 328 (part 1, sec. 3, member 1, subsec. 3).

69. Pythois 1621, 16–20.

70. Ditchfield 1995, 216–220.

71. De Maio 1973, 265–267; Dalla Torre 1991, 231–263; Schutte 1994, 280–281.

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III

BEYOND THE SELF

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MARGALIT FINKELBERG

Religion and Biography in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

Self-knowledge and Self-transformation

The ancient Greeks defined man's place in the universe through his relation to the gods. The very fact that the word "mortal," θνητός, was as legitimate a designation of man as the word "man" proper clearly indicates that the existence of the "immortals," ἀθάνατοι, was a necesary factor in man's self-definition. It was generally recognized that between men and gods there was a gap that could not be bridged. To quote what Homer makes Apollo say to Diomedes, who dared to raise his weapon against the god: "Never think yourself the gods' equal—since there can be no likeness between the make of immortal gods and of men who walk on the ground."[1] Any attempt at transgressing the line dividing men and gods was considered a religious offense which was inevitably followed by punishment from the gods. "The jealousy of the gods," φθόνος θεῶν, and "trespassing," ὕβρις, known to us only too well from Greek sources, are the two ideas that illuminate the nature of the phenomenon with great precision.

But was the gap dividing men from gods as absolute as it appears at first sight? The important caveat here is that the Greek gods, who did not create the world but themselves were "born" in the process of its development, were conceived of as immanent to the universe and therefore subject to its laws. The supreme forces that in fact ruled the universe were "necessity," ἀνάγκη, and "destiny," μοῖρα, to which even the gods were subject. Their laws apply equally to gods, to natural phenomena, and to humans. As a result, nature, gods, and men were envisaged as belonging to the same whole ruled by the same eternal laws, habitually interpreted not only in terms of necessity and destiny but also in those of harmony and justice. Thus Heraclitus wrote: "Sun will not overstep its measures; otherwise the Erinyes, ministers of Justice, will find it out." Compare this to the following admonition from Herodotus's *History*: "See how god with his lightning always smites the bigger animals, and will not suffer them to wax insolent, while those of a lesser bulk chafe him not. How likewise his bolts fall ever on the highest houses and the tallest trees? So plainly does he love to bring down everything that exalts itself (τά ὑπερέχοντα)."[2] That is to say,

the moral laws apply to natural phenomena to the same degree that the laws of nature apply to the life of man. Or, as Plato's Socrates put it in the *Gorgias*, "wise men say that the heavens and the earth, gods and men, are bound together by fellowship (κοινωνία) and friendship (φιλία), and order (κοσμιότης) and temperance (σωφροσύνη) and justice (δικαιότης), and for this reason they call the sum of things the 'ordered' universe (κόσμος), not the world of disorder and riot."[3]

Thus Greek religion simultaneously maintains that there is an unbridgeable gap between humans and gods and that men and gods are united within the same universal order. In *The Greeks and Their Gods*, W. K. C. Guthrie defined this paradox as "a central problem" of Greek belief. He described it as follows:

> There are two ways of regarding the relationship between man and god which at first sight are diametrically opposed. . . . Which idea, then, are we to take as the more truly representative of the Greek religious mind: that there was a great gulf between mortal and immortal, between man and god, and that for man to attempt to bridge it was *hybris* and could only end in disaster, or that there was a kinship between human and divine, and that it was the duty of man to live a life which would emphasize this kinship and make it as close as possible?[4]

It seems to me, however, that, rather than mutually exclusive, the two attitudes referred to by Guthrie are mutually complementary, in that they in fact represent two different aspects of a single religious intuition. Consider the following simile: "The generation of men is like that of leaves. The wind scatters one year's leaves on the ground, but the forest burgeons and puts out others, as the season of spring comes round. So it is with men: one generation grows on, and another is passing away." This is the impartial view of human existence as expressed by Homer in book 6 of the *Iliad*. In one of his elegies, the lyric poet Mimnermus (sixth century B.C.E.) comments on this as follows:

> But we are like the leaves that flowery spring
> puts forth, quick spreading in the sun's warm light:
> for a brief span of time we take our joy
> in our youth's bloom, the future, good or ill,
> kept from us, while the twin dark Dooms stand by,
> one bringing to fulfilment harsh old age,
> the other, death. The ripeness of youth's fruit
> is short, short as the sunlight on the earth,
> and once this season of perfection's past,
> it's better to be dead than stay alive.

This is the same Mimnermus, it should be added, who in one of his elegies asked the famous question: "What's life, what's joy, without golden Aphrodite? / I hope I die when I no longer care / for secret closeness, tender favours, bed, / which are the rapturous flowers that grace youth's prime / for men and women."[5]

Homer and Mimnermus give us two different perspectives on the same phenomenon. Homer's perspective, in that it places man on a par with other natural phenomena, is the objective one: like leaves, men are part of the universal order; this does not prevent the death of the individual but guarantees immortality to humankind as a whole. As distinct from this, Mimnermus's perspective is, as it were,

that of a single leaf conscious of its individual perishability. Once this consciousness emerges, the immortality of the general order of which man is a part is no consolation to the individual, especially one who, like Mimnermus, cares deeply for bodily joys and material well-being. The same applies to men of action. They are those who, like the young Xerxes to whom Herodotus's admonition is addressed, aspire to raise themselves above the average, "to exalt themselves," as Herodotus defines it. In fact, it is the men of action who are especially prone to expose themselves to the hazards of fate because, insofar as they do not try to be in harmony with the eternal order of things, they often initiate actions which are at variance with this order—and as a result are punished by the gods who are its guardians. "The doer will suffer" (δράσαντα παθεῖν)—this Aeschylean maxim, which runs as a leitmotif through his *Oresteia*, aptly expresses the rule that is universally applied to men of action.

Now, whether man values the pleasures of life or not, whether he is ambitious or not, this does not change his objective position within the universe and his all too predictable end. The difference is in the attitude: one whose behavior and attitude are at variance with the laws of the universe will suffer because, whether he realizes this or not, he will ever remain subject to these laws. By the same token, one who is wise enough to accept the universal laws and to act in accordance with them will lead a happier life. But to arrive at this condition, man has to overcome his particularity, to discard the joys of life and his individual ambitions, in short, to become something different from what his everyday experience teaches him to be. This is deliberate self-transformation, at the end of which the individual consciously becomes part of the universal order while still alive. In doing that, he overcomes his mortal nature and approaches closer to the divine.

In fact, it is this very continuity between the universe, the macrocosm, and man, the microcosm, that gives man hope, because it makes it possible for him to understand the eternal laws that rule the universe, to realize his own place within it, and thus to overcome his mortality. "Know yourself" was written on the gates of the great temple of Apollo at Delphi; that is to say, "Know your limitations as a man and your proper place within the universe, and behave in accordance with this knowledge." But "know yourself" also meant "know your human nature, which is the same as the nature of the universe and is subject to the same laws." According to this attitude, the wisdom that consists in understanding the order of the universe gives man a true perspective of himself, a perspective which in turn can mould his behavior and his entire way of life. To quote Heraclitus again: "To be of sober mind (σωφροσύνη) is the greatest virtue, and wisdom is to tell the truth and to act in accordance with nature while listening to it."[6] This attitude is common to all trends of Greek philosophy at every stage of its existence. By "knowing himself," that is, by realizing that he enjoys no special status within the comprehensive divine order, man overcomes his separateness from this order and becomes part of it. Thus "knowing oneself" is both the first step and the necessary precondition in the morphology of self-transformation in archaic and classical Greece. The second step, which was also the aim of the entire process, consisted in the dialectics of man's becoming one with the divine whole of which he has always been a part.

It was generally believed that most humans are able to achieve this end only after death, in the final transformation that carries their souls back to their immortal

source; accordingly, salvation of the soul was at the center of the mystic rites which were practiced all over the ancient world. Transforming oneself so as to become united with the divine even before death could only be achieved by abstaining from action and abiding by a strict ascetic discipline, which amounted to reducing one's own human nature when still alive. Small wonder, then, that this way was regarded as suitable only for the wise and holy. The institutional framework within which men could amend their nature by trying to get closer to the divine was supplied by religious trends and philosophical schools, each of which offered its own distinctive version of restoring the unity between the human and the divine by means of self-transformation. Let us take some examples.

As is widely known, the Orphics and related religious trends aspired to deliverance from bodily existence through participation in mystic rites and purifications and through the so-called Orphic life of purity. The same with the early philosophers.[7] Heraclitus's high esteem for the dryness of the soul implies that the human being's goal is to purify the soul of the evil influence of the wet bodily principle. The first step toward this end is communion with the divine through its logos, which the human being shares and which is revealed by "searching oneself." In its communion with the deity, the human being acquires understanding of the true nature of things, that is, realizes what the true end is and how it can be achieved. This understanding is reached by cultivating the divine principle in human being, the soul's logos, and living in accordance with it, arduously struggling to suppress the bodily principle. This effort requires abstention from bodily inclinations. Sexual abstinence comes to mind in this connection; also intended may be dietary restrictions and abstentions, such as the abstention from wine, and therapeutic procedures to increase and maintain the soul's dryness. The life lived in accordance with the logos will be one of righteousness and virtue.

Both the Orphics and Heraclitus belong to the sixth century B.C.E. In the fifth century, another philosopher, Empedocles from Sicily, greeted his fellow citizens in the following words: "All hail! I go about among you an immortal god, no longer a mortal!"[8] In the fourth century, Plato maintained that man's chief aim is "the completest possible assimilation to god," and Aristotle thought that man has "to put off mortality as far as possible."[9] In Plato's *Symposium* and the Seventh Letter we find an elaborate program of man's gradual ascendance from his mortal appetites and aspirations to the final unity with the divine. To arrive at this unity, man has to transform himself by passing through the following stages: (1) love for a single beautiful body; (2) love for physical beauty as such rather than for a single beautiful body; (3) love for the moral beauty of the soul as well as that of laws and institutions rather than for physical beauty; (4) love for the intellectual beauty of the sciences; (5) love for the Beautiful itself, which is the same as God.[10] This specific pattern of self-transformation was adopted and pursued by numerous followers of Plato up to the end of antiquity.

The Lesson of Tragedy

Where does the ordinary man enter this picture? For all we know, his was the popular wisdom which, like the Homeric simile adduced above, emphasized the universal truth of the individual's perishable nature without demanding that he make an

effort to become one with the divine through self-transformation. Another Delphic maxim, "Nothing too much," gives a fair picture of what an average person was expected to do in order neither to become a danger to the community nor to expose himself to disasters resulting from self-indulgence and improper pride. This idea passes as a leitmotif through the maxims of the Seven Sages, through Herodotus's *History*, and, most significantly, through Pindar's celebrations of the moments of what the Greeks saw as the greatest achievement attainable to a human, namely, victory in a Panhellenic competition.

Of all literary and nonliterary genres, it was above all tragedy that made illumination of the gap between the divine and the human perspective on things its main concern. It is only too rarely taken into account that the fact that the plots used in Attic tragedy were traditional and therefore well known to the audience meant, as simply as possible, that the audience's vantage point was never identical to that of the characters. Rather, the vantage point of the audience was identical to that of the poet himself and, in the last analysis, to that of the gods. That is to say, while the characters did not know the outcomes of their stories, the poet, the gods, and the audience did. The distance thus created between the audience and the characters produced the well-known phenomenon of "tragic irony" to which Attic tragedy owes some of its best effects.

The audience's omniscience, inherent as it was to Attic tragedy, was recreated at every performance. That is to say, the audience was expected to contemplate the gap between the false human and the true divine perspective of things and invited to think of the ways by which this gap could be amended. Thus, in *Oedipus the King*, the audience understands the real situation of the protagonist, while he himself does not. Accordingly, the audience comes closer to understanding the existential situation of man, even of such an outstanding one as Oedipus, as it really is. Or take for example the end of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, which deals with the agony and death of Hercules. The tragedy's characters are totally ignorant of the magnificent future in store for Hercules, and in their eyes, therefore, he dies an ordinary death. Small wonder, then, that Hercules's son Hyllos is only too eager to find a breech in the divine justice and to blame Zeus himself for Hercules's misfortunes. The fact of overwhelming importance however is that both poet and audience knew that Hercules became one of the Olympians immediately upon his death. The powerful dramatic effect thus produced was rendered by Hugh Lloyd-Jones as follows: "For the audience, Sophocles has made it possible to transcend for a moment the limited view of happenings in the world normally possible to mortals and to see, for once, into the purposes of Zeus."[11] That is to say, notwithstanding what people experience and think at any given moment, the divine laws under which they live are just. Men's sufferings and mistakes are therefore the direct result of their inability to see further than their immediate experience. Note that the tension thus created between mortals' ignorance of their real position in the world and the ultimate divine design is again none other than the poignant tragic irony that is so characteristic of Sophocles' theater.

This is not to say that every playwright was equal to this effect or was interested in exploiting it. Among the characters of the extant tragedies of Aeschylus, Xerxes of the *Persae* is the only one who is totally ignorant of his true situation. As R. P. Winnington-Ingram has shown, the true perspective of things is supplied in the play by

the ghost of Darius, who explains to both the choir of the Persian elders and the Athenian audience how large the gap is between Xerxes' own idea of events and the grand historical design of the gods.[12] In Aeschylus's other tragedies, the characters are represented as fully aware of what they are doing and therefore as ready to bear the consequences of their acts. The gods and the eternal laws of which they are the guardians are rational and just, and man, rational creature that he is, needs no special effort, certainly no transformation, to understand the justice of the divine order, even when this order makes him suffer. This is why Aeschylus's characters make their choices and meet their destinies with their eyes open. This is true of his Eteocles, who chooses to meet his brother in single combat, being fully aware that this will bring about his own death and, together with it, the deliverance of his city; of his Orestes, who, when deciding to kill his mother, is fully aware again that persecution by the Erinyes will be a necessary outcome of this act; and above all of his Agamemnon, who, when choosing to sacrifice Iphigenia rather than to abandon the execution of divine justice as regards Troy, consciously "puts his neck under the yoke of necessity (ἀνάγκη)."[13] In Aeschylus's world, there is no place for loose ends, for illusion and self-deceit. But then, Aeschylus was a great optimist and a great believer in the rational nature of the existing order of things. In this, he did not differ from other advanced thinkers of the age who, as for example Protagoras, firmly believed in progress and the unlimited abilities of man.

Sophocles was different. His was the traditional Delphic piety whose message concerning man was mostly pessimistic. Like Aeschylus, Sophocles believed that the divine order is just, but unlike Aeschylus, he did not believe that man is always equal to this truth. This is why most of his characters remain imprisoned in their illusions almost to the end. Sophocles indeed was a great poet of illusion as the essence of human experience, unsurpassed in this respect in the European theater up to the time of Calderón. Think for a moment of his Deianeira, who imbues her husband's clothes with what she believes to be a love charm, being blind to the obvious truth that it is in fact a deadly poison; or of his Electra, who clings to the funerary urn containing what she believes to be the ashes of her beloved brother, reluctant to recognize that this very brother is standing, alive, in front of her. Characteristically, even when they happen to be lucky, as his Electra and Philoctetes certainly are, Sophocles' characters are as blind in face of the true state of affairs as those for whom the discovery of truth amounts to disaster and unending sorrow.

This is why the process of the characters' disillusionment through their arriving at an understanding of their true position in the world is so important a factor in Sophoclean theater. Even Ajax, probably the proudest of Sophocles' characters, eventually comes to terms with the world order: a few moments before he commits suicide, he comes to understand that just as winter gives way to summer, and night to day, so also he must yield to the gods and his superiors or, to put it in his own words, "to learn to be prudent (σωφρονεῖν)."[14] Similarly, the self-confident Creon of the *Antigone*, who at the beginning of the tragedy sees himself as the very embodiment of the power and justice of the state, ends by styling himself as being "next to nobody."[15] And finally, the Oedipus of *Oedipus the King*, arguably the most brilliant intellect of his generation, ends by realizing that he knows nothing either about himself or about the world around him. This is of course "know yourself" at its most effective. Oedipus's meeting with the blind prophet Teiresias is set up as the

direct confrontation of the owner of a superior intellect, "a high IQ" as we would probably say today, with a humble bearer of traditional wisdom originating in contact with the divine. Oedipus reproves the blind prophet of Apollo, telling him that he, who had not been able to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, is not in a position to lay claim to superior knowledge. Teiresias's answer is simple: "it is you who see but do not discern at what point of disaster you are found, where you live, and with whom you cohabit."[16]

It is at this point that Sophocles comes as close as possible to his younger contemporary Socrates, who also interpreted the Delphic maxim to the effect that what generally counts as superior human knowledge in fact amounts to nothing. Following the famous Delphic response that he, in that he maintains that he knows nothing, is the wisest man in the world, Socrates did his best to try to make the Athenians as wise as himself by demonstrating to them that the knowledge of which they were so proud in fact amounted to nothing. "But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this, that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us, The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless."[17] It is not difficult to see that this is the same lesson as the one that *Oedipus the King* teaches us.

We saw, however, that "knowing himself," indispensable as it is, is only the first step in man's conscious adaptation of his nature to the divine order. Is it always to be followed by self-transformation? Socrates, for one, firmly believed that, as soon as man realizes his true place in the world, self-transformation is inevitable. But Socrates, like Aeschylus, was a rationalist in whose opinion right understanding amounted to right behavior. Sophocles, again, was different. His tragedies do not allow us to infer that he believed that understanding their true situation changes people's behavior and their very natures. Ajax and Deianeira commit suicide; Creon and Electra do not try to change their lives after acquiring a new understanding of their position in the world. Only *Oedipus the King* offers what can be seen as the closest approximation to the idea of self-transformation. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Oedipus's self-blinding at the end of the tragedy brings him as close as possible to the position of the prophet Teiresias, the blind bearer of superior wisdom. But even this tragedy does not provide sufficient reason to suppose that Oedipus's newly acquired understanding points in the direction of his adopting a new way of life.

As far as I can see, Sophocles' abstention from making the process of self-transformation part of his tragedies was due to the fact that the lesson this would have taught his audience would have been at variance with the communal function of the tragic performance. When taken to its logical end, man's aspiring to become one with the divine would inevitably result in his disentangling himself from all communal and family ties, from any form of involvement in social life, in short, in his ceasing to be what Aristotle defined as ζῶον πολιτικόν, a "city-state animal." To be sure, this was what the philosophers eventually taught when they put the life of philosophical contemplation and inquiry above any other form of life. It was, however, not the kind of lesson which could be presented with profit before a mass audience consisting of the citizens of the Athenian state and at a public performance

sponsored by this very state. This is probably one of the reasons that Sophocles aimed only to bring his audience to realize the gap between the divine and the human perspective of things but never tried to bring home the unavoidable truth that adopting the divine perspective would annihilate any form of human interest, including that affecting one's own family and community.

The Transformation of Oedipus

All this changes in *Oedipus at Colonus*. This last of Sophocles' tragedies is unique in the corpus of Attic drama in that it brings to the stage a genuine mystery play, that is, the sacred rite of man being transformed into god. It is true, of course, that the blind and destitute vagabond whom we meet at the beginning of the tragedy has been brought to his present state as the result of a personal disaster rather than by his own choice. This however does not alter the fact that he is now at a point which, as we saw, both religion and philosophy treated as a sine qua non of self-transformation — the very point at which, so to say, the curtain drops in Sophocles' other plays, including his first Oedipus tragedy.

What kind of dramatic plot can develop from the situation in which man finds himself stripped of all his illusions, powerless and alone in the midst of the hostile world? Certainly not that of the increasing suspense maintained by closely knit action so well known to us from *Oedipus the King*. Small wonder, therefore, that the plot of *Oedipus at Colonus* is of the kind later defined by Aristotle as "episodic," namely, one in which the unity of action is diluted in a succession of single episodes that do not follow the strict logic of the cause-and-effect relationship. The precedents for this kind of plot among the extant Greek tragedies, and above all the *Trojan Women* of Euripides, show us that while the episodic play certainly loses in terms of unity of action, it gains in terms of the intensity of the tragic mood. Its inner logic can be compared to that of movements in a symphony, and the overall impression left by it is certainly closer to music than to drama proper.[18] *Oedipus at Colonus* is no exception to this rule.

It is generally agreed that the main dramatic development of this play is Oedipus's gradual increase in stature. The helpless suppliant of the Prologue emerges toward the end of the tragedy as a dominant figure towering above the rest of the characters, a man whose presence is so powerful that his final apotheosis comes as no more than the formal sanctioning of the position he has already attained. The question however remains open as to how Sophocles makes Oedipus arrive at this position. As far as I can see, this question can only be properly answered if we follow the development of the tragedy's plot step by step.

At the beginning of the tragedy, in the Prologue and the Parodos, Oedipus, exile though he is, is nevertheless deeply involved with what happens in his country and family. All these years, he has continued to be in contact with Thebes through Ismene, a daughter who stayed in the city mainly in order to keep her father informed about the state of affairs at home. All this begins to change gradually in the First Episode, when Ismene arrives to tell her father and her sister Antigone, who has remained with Oedipus all these years, that Thebes at last wants Oedipus back, but only in order to bury him close to its borders after his death, and that his sons

have abandoned him. According to the prophecy of Apollo, Oedipus's tomb will be a blessing to the land in which he will be buried, and this is the only reason that the Thebans have renewed their interest in this most famous of their exiles. Deeply hurt by this betrayal, Oedipus transfers his loyalty to Athens, whose ruler, Theseus, offers him protection and shelter in his city.

In the Second Episode, Creon arrives from Thebes to take Oedipus back to his country. But Oedipus is already beyond the claims of patriotism and civic loyalty. He rejects and curses Thebes and, in the Third Episode, adopts Athens as his new home, because it is only here that he has found piety (τὸ εὐσεβές), fairness (τοὐπιεικές), and sincerity (τὸ μὴ ψευδοστομεῖν).[19] This pattern is repeated in the Fourth Episode, in Oedipus's confrontation with his son Polynices, who comes to him as a suppliant. Not only the ties of community but also even the ties of blood no longer affect the former king of Thebes. Just as he sets a foreign city over his own on the grounds of its moral superiority, so he puts his daughters above his sons—decidedly a highly unorthodox choice for a Greek male. Nevertheless, Oedipus curses and rejects his sons just as he had cursed and rejected his country. This is far too much for the ordinary citizens of Colonus who form the Chorus. But at the very moment when they start formulating their disapproval of the stranger's cruel and abnormal behavior, we hear the thunderbolt calling Oedipus to join the company of immortal heroes. The mystery play of Oedipus's apotheosis begins.

What could have been Sophocles' purpose in representing on the Athenian stage the mystery of man's transformation into god? To be sure, Sophocles was a deeply religious man and an important figure in Athens's religious life. He was priest of a local healing deity and made his own house a place of worship for Asclepius until the temple built for the god was ready.[20] In his tragedies, he often confronts the demands of state with the values of traditional religion, always to the disadvantage of the former. The *Antigone* is of course the best-known example, but by no means the only one. At the same time, it is highly doubtful that Sophocles would deliberately aim to encourage his audience to disconnect themselves from their community in the way his Oedipus does. After all, *Oedipus at Colonus*, with its unconditional celebration of the glory of Athens, is beyond doubt the most patriotic of Sophocles' plays. It seems to me that the correct interpretation of the last of Sophocles' tragedies would be that here, probably for the first and the only time, Sophocles, the unsurpassed creator of universal paradigms of human predicament, chose to treat a deeply personal theme.

The tragedy's action is set in Colonus, the place of Sophocles' birth. Its hero is an old man conscious of his approaching death. Sophocles was ninety years old when he wrote *Oedipus at Colonus*, and he died soon afterward. The ode to old age sung by the Chorus in the Third Stasimon is arguably one of the most profound lyric pieces in the entire corpus of Greek poetry. The tempo of the tragedy as a whole is that of an old man's gradual and, as it were, natural transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Moreover, according to biographies of Sophocles, the end of his life was clouded by the lawsuit of his sons, who tried to proclaim the old poet senile and unable to look after his household and property. It is said that Sophocles read the Second Stasimon of *Oedipus at Colonus* before the jury and was acquitted. Above all, he was a religious man and a priest who knew

only too well that becoming one with the divine could only be achieved through disentangling oneself from everything that is human and therefore mortal. All these autobiographical elements are present in the Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus*, all except the final apotheosis. The amazing thing about Sophocles's last tragedy, however, is that even this element did not remain lacking for very long. After his death in the same year, and in recognition of his service to Asclepius, Sophocles himself was canonized as a divine hero. He was worshipped in Athens under the cult name of Dexion. All this makes the *Oedipus at Colonus* a deeply personal piece, perhaps even a testimony to the individual self-transformation experienced by its poet toward the end of his life.

Notes

1. *Il.* 5. 440–442.
2. Heraclitus fr. 94 DK; Hdt. 7.10 de.
3. Pl. *Gorg.* 507e-508a.
4. Guthrie 1954, 113–114.
5. *Il.* 6. 146–149; Mimn. 2.1ff., 1.1ff. tr. M. L. West. slightly changed.
6. Heraclitus fr. 112 DK.
7. See A. Finkelberg 1986, 330–331.
8. Fr. 112.4 DK.
9. Pl. *Theaet.* 176b; Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1177b 33.
10. See M. Finkelberg 1997, 241–245.
11. Lloyd-Jones 1983, 128; see also M. Finkelberg 1996, 129–143.
12. Winnington-Ingram 1973, 210–219.
13. Aesch. *Agam.* 218.
14. Soph. *Aias* 666–677.
15. Soph. *Ant.* 1325.
16. Soph. *OT* 413–414.
17. Pl. *Ap.* 23ab tr. Hugh Tredennick.
18. Cf. Kitto 1961, 215.
19. Soph. *OC* 1125–1127.
20. Plut. *Num.* 3, *Etym. Magn.* s.v. Δεξιών. He also composed a paean to Asclepius.

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JANET GYATSO

The Ins and Outs of Self-Transformation

Personal and Social Sides of Visionary Practice in Tibetan Buddhism

I can begin in no other way than by stating that Tibetan Buddhism is utterly consumed with programs of self-transformation. From the stone floor of the cave to the home of the village lama, the ritual assembly of the monastery, and the exalted seat of power of the Dalai Lamas, self-transformation often seems to be the only interesting game in town. Its presumptions are at the heart of the famous "patron-priest" dynamic and much of the political and economic power that religious heirarchs could wield in Tibet up to the middle of the twentieth century.[1] This essay presents what I see as some of the main threads in this large phenomenon. But I must note right away that I will have to neglect several other important threads, for example, the more indigenously Tibetan ones constituted by clan identities and loyalties, whose associated conceptions about personhood fed importantly into the Buddhist industry of self-transformation. Not only am I limited by space; the connection between Tibet's religions and its social history in any event has barely begun to be explored by any scholar, modern or traditional Tibetan. Nonetheless there is much we can learn merely by considering the formally Buddhist ideologies and iconographies that were so centrally ingredient to the image and status of the Tibetan religious master.

I will organize my remarks around the interaction between what we might characterize as the inner and outer faces of transformation. Most basically, this means that I am interested in the relationship—which should include also discontinuities—between the personal self-conception of religious actors and the way such actors are marked by others.

First, two very general points: One concerns the term "transformation" itself. It is significant that we have no trouble whatsoever in finding an analogous term in Tibetan. Among several candidates, the best is *sgyur*, the causative of the verb *'gyur*, "to change." *sGyur* is a critical term that marks the tantric approach in Tibetan Buddhism altogether.[2] Most generally, what it connotes in Tibetan discussions of tantric religion is an approach that contrasts to what is conceived as the inferior "Hīnayāna" Buddhist path of discarding sinful practices, thus creating a strict separation

between the pure and impure. In contrast, the tantric path is supposed to be the one in which nothing is discarded, and the impure is realized actually to be, in fact, pure. Everything is usable, even manure. It is an alchemical metaphor, and alchemical practices are often explicitly invoked. "Transformation" refers in particular to the cultivation of what is called "pure vision" (*dag-snang*). This is an ability to see everything in its pure form, its potential enlightened manifestation. So, for example, the tantric practitioner is advised to transform her perception of her surroundings into a crystal palace, her food into buddha-nectar, and even her negative emotions of desire and aggression into their enlightened counterparts: bliss-emptiness, vajra anger, and so forth.

Our term "*self*-transformation" in the Tibetan religious context would refer to the particular kind of transformation within the larger project just sketched out which focuses upon the individual self. Here the practitioner is to see himself as—and thereby to become—what he would be if he were to completely fulfill his potential for enlightenment. The most well-articulated route for such self-transformation in tantra proceeds through *sādhana* meditation.[3] This is the procedure to visualize oneself as a tantric buddha or deity-figure; such procedures stem from Indian tantra, but they became very popular and developed further in Tibet. Sādhana texts spell out the process of self transformation very precisely. Sometimes the self is transformed when visualized buddhas or deities appear in the space in front of the meditator (*bdun-bskyed*) and grant blessings and powers. Sometimes they instead sit on the meditator's head (*spyi-bskyed*) and squirt transformative substances into his brain. The most thoroughgoing self-transformation is called self-creation (*bdag-bskyed*).[4] The meditator actually becomes the enlightened buddha deity. The visualization of the meditator's body, speech, and mind in a new guise is then supported by mantric chants, along with a re-visioning of inner organs as well as experience as such. All of this is laid out in complex detail. It is a meditative exercise that people perform in certain places and on certain occasions, but the virtuoso is supposed to be sustaining the transformation all the time—even during sleep (and even, and especially, after death!). Its basic structures organize many subtypes of self-transformation as well, but before going any further, let me make my second very general point.

It has to do with the metaphysical view underlying self-transformation in Tibetan tantra. This is the classic Buddhist notion of "no-self." Who and what and how the individual is is neither essential nor permanent, according to this emblematic doctrine; rather, the self is constructed, conditioned by past actions and present preconceptions.[5] As habits, experiences, and attitudes change, the self changes. The self, most basically, is believed to be fluid and flexible, an ever-changing bundle of memories, dispositions, experiences, and conceptions. By being conditioned and constructed, then, the self is also viewed as changeable. Changing it, however, is not easy, since karma and habits and tendencies are recalcitrant and dense; but fundamental to tantric practice is the assumption that change is possible. Such a program is seen as requiring considerable determination, effort, and know-how to retrain and transform the contours and nature of that bundle, and most Tibetan Buddhists do not seriously consider taking it up. But a few do, and those who are the principal heroes of Tibetan Buddhism are precisely those who are seen as being virtuosi in the methods and rituals of self-transformative technique.

Given the centrality of sādhana visualization traditions for the ideology of self-transformation, its actual procedures merit a closer look. These are classically divided into two main parts. The first, the "creation stage" (*utpattikrama*), consists in a visualization of the meditator's outer appearance.[6] This typically starts by imagining the conventional self and surroundings to have dissolved into nothingness, making for a *tabula rasa* out of which something new can emerge. Out of this nothing, then, appears a mantric seed syllable, a sort of buddha-gene, from which sprouts the full image of the deity into whom the meditator is transforming. The important point in "self-creation" meditation is that the visualized image is not seen in the mind's eye as an object; rather the meditator sees him- or herself from within as having become the deity, as — if the sādhana is about, say, the bodhisattva Tārā — having green skin, silk robes, that hairdo with half bun, half locks hanging free, a third eye, a halo, and so on.[7] The practice is often cast as an exercise in being able to keep an entire picture in mind. And then on top of that, the meditator is to cultivate the belief that he or she *is* Tārā. They cultivate that belief by chanting prayers to themselves and imagining that the real Tārā "out there" (*jñānasattva*) comes and blesses the mere visualized image of Tārā (*samayasattva*) initially created in the meditation. When the now consecrated and authorized self-vision as Tārā is stable, the goals of the creation stage would be said to have been achieved.

The second stage is called "completion" (*sampannakrama*).[8] This turns the meditator from the outer face of self-transformation to its inner experience. Special channels are visualized inside the body, with winds and seminal substances coursing through them. These winds and seminal substances are to be experienced intensely. They are seen as creating intense blissful experiences that are cultivated and encouraged further. They are identified as the experiences of the deity whom the meditator is becoming. The texts stress, however, that the emptiness of these experiences must be realized simultaneously with undergoing them.[9] This self-reflexive realization of the emptiness of experience is considered the essential quality that renders inner experience identifiable with that of the buddha-deity.

The creation and completion stages together constitute a three-dimensional map of self-transformation: the meditator learns to see him- or herself as looking like the buddha-deity from the outside, appropriates the speech patterns of the deity by chanting its mantras, and learns to feel the experiences of the deity within.

But other dimensions of the inner-outer dialectic of sādhana meditation can be discerned as well. Consider, for example, that the entire transformation facilitated by sādhana is governed by the rule that the meditator must first participate in a ritual initiation granted by a master.[10] This initiation will be some form of the Indic *abhiṣeka*, that is, one of the special varieties developed in Buddhist tantra. Abhiṣeka became big business in Tibetan religion, where its operation and presumptions reveal a variety of ways in which self-transformation has a resolutely outer face.[11]

Much of this outer face is social. Receiving abhiṣeka is tantamount to receiving permission to engage in self-transformation. In other words, individuals are not considered to possess the permission to transform themselves according to the methods of tantric sādhana automatically. Rather, they must first take part in a ritual, a ritual that is controlled by others.[12] This already suggests the very fundamental status of the power relations that are intrinsic to the self-transformative process in this system.

The disciple must not only provide substantial material offerings in exchange for admission into the initiation circle; he or she must also be explicitly approved for entry in the first place, either by the lama or the lama's assistants, who literally guard the doorways and control entrance. It is altogether common for people who desire abhiṣeka to be refused entry, on a variety of grounds ranging from the lama's judgment that the supplicant has not completed the required preparatory practices to any number of economic or class oppositions between the lama's entourage and a given supplicant.[13]

Next, the ritual of the abhiṣeka as such provides further socialization. The disciple will often receive a new name in the course of it, may don new garb, and may inaugurate new practices. Most basically, the receipt of abhiṣeka marks the fact that the disciple has been formally accepted into the lineage of masters who have sustained the tradition in the past. In short, the receipt of abhiṣeka confers a transformed identity already, an identity constituted by tradition and social interaction. Note that this conferral is witnessed by others: the lama, his attendants, the fellow initiates, and the surrounding community of devoted practitioners and sponsors. The last may not have been present at the initiation because they already received it earlier, or they were denied admission or never requested admission in the first place; in any event, such persons will often take note of who enters the initiatory chamber.

The traditional reasons why abhiṣeka is required for self-transformation are various. One concerns the protection of the practitioner: it insures that the transformative techniques being taken up can be traced back to an authoritative source. This source is said to be either a buddha or the human master who first received the sādhana as a revelatory transmission from a buddha or equivalent.[14] The idea is that if the sādhana technique is not stamped with the enlightened realization of such an author, it either will not work or will work but will land the person taking up its practices in hell. Not to work is defined in some texts as meaning that the meditator will never have the requisite experiences of the buddha/deity.[15] To work but to land the practitioner in hell is more complex and represents some combination of the notion that protocol and authority have been violated, which deserves punishment, and a more subtle notion that without the seal of enlightened realization someone's self-transformation will not resolutely and always be seen as ultimately empty and will instead become a source of pride, attachment, ego, and so on, that is, the classical Buddhist reasons for which people go to hell. To resolutely view self-transformation always as empty is for self-transformation to be thoroughly stamped with Buddhist doctrine, yet a further way that self-transformation is governed from without.

It is striking to find that the experience that is cultivated in the context of abhiṣeka is not conceived as a purely internal affair but rather has a critical external dimension. In a recently published article on this topic, I explored the significance of the notion of transmission in tantric Buddhist abhiṣeka, wherein not only permissions and techniques and implements are transmitted but also experience, which turns out to be transactable goods in this system.[16] The master actually introduces the student to "realized experience" for the first time. This is seen as an initial seed that the student then later cultivates in his or her personal sādhana practice. Such experience is conveyed through the media of specially constructed sensible data:

substances to taste, sounds to hear, and so on, all of which are constructed just so as to engineer an experience in the disciple.

None of this denies the intimately inner face of the transformed experience that abhiṣeka initiates. Powerful sensations of bliss and clarity are often reported and analyzed, sensations which are specified to be as inexpressible as they are intense.[17] As the student becomes immersed in regular daily sessions of sādhana practice subsequent to the ritual, a broad range of what we might consider inner experiences can dawn. Dreams are given a great deal of attention, especially those considered to be "auspicious," such as dreams in which appears the deity who is the focus of the meditator's self-transformation. In dreams, such buddha/deities are seen granting more abhiṣeka, or conferring something to taste or to wear, or providing some sort of special instruction. The same is also said to happen in spontaneous visions when the student is not sleeping. We could have recourse to Jung's idea of archetypal imagination here, whereby active imagining on the part of the individual suddenly or seemingly spontaneously takes off on its own; the imagined visages become animated.[18] Such an experience is often reported in Tibetan biography, and it is taken to mean that the student is incorporating the sādhana practice into his or her entire life. There is also the related practice of "carrying onto the path" (*lam-khyer*): this involves a deliberate assimilation of the fruits of focused meditation into everyday existence, outside of the strict meditation period per se. It entails maintaining the vision of the self *as* the deity, seeing everything in the environment as the maṇḍala of the deity, hearing all sounds as the mantra of the deity, experiencing all sensations as the realized experience of the deity, and participating in the deity's enlightened state of mind. One of the most valued signs that self-transformation is being carried into the rest of the individual's existence and starting to take on a life of its own is, again, when the deity appears in a vision and preaches a religious teaching of some sort. This in fact is the principal way that revelation is explained in Tibetan Buddhism. Such visionary sermons are recorded and become sacred scriptures on their own. Having such an experience is considered to be a major sign that the meditator has come a long way on the path of self-transformation.

I want to call attention to the way that the success of self-transformation is gauged by "signs" (often *grub pa'i ltas* or *rtags*, also *phan-yon*, "benefits"). This is a key concept in many traditions of Tibetan Buddhist practice. One often encounters lists and descriptions of the signs of accomplishment of the transformative meditation under discussion.[19] Note that the practitioner cannot just recognize the validity of his or her own experience on its own; rather, that needs to be identified by means of markers and indications. In other words, even at the level of intimate experience, self-transformation is known and assessed from what is in this sense its outside: how it appears, what comes along with it, what defines and measures it, and what it *points to*.

Self-transformation is further objectified when it is articulated by its subject in the form of autobiographical accounts — either oral or written — of how that transformation unfolded. The plethora of such oral accounts in Tibetan tradition and especially the astounding volume of autobiographical and biographical writing that is preserved in Tibetan literature distinguishes the annals of Tibetan Buddhism from many others.[20] The fundamental presupposition of this literary genre is that it re-

counts a course of self-transformation. The genre label is *rnam-thar*, which translates the Sanskrit *vimokṣa:* "complete liberation," that is, enlightenment, Buddhistically conceived. The connotation is "[story of] complete liberation." The life story in Tibetan literature tells of someone's transformation into an enlightened Buddhist master.

Why does such a story have to be written? It almost seems to have to be, given the fact that virtually every religious figure of any note in Tibet has either one or several autobiographies, or else several biographies, usually composed by successors on the basis of orally transmitted autobiographical material. Why would it not be enough simply to go through a process of self-transformation, without writing about it? Once again we are back to the outer side of self-transformation. The transformed person needs to tell others about it. I will speculate further that without an audience, self-transformation does not take place.

Most prosaically, the need of the subject of self-transformation to report his experience is conditioned by the protocols of behavior on the part of Tibetan teachers, a protocol rationalized in line with the Buddhist ethics of compassionate teaching, which is in turn the emblematic vocation of the master in this tradition. This means that the principal readers of Tibetan autobiography are the protagonist's faithful disciples. *rNam-thars* are avowedly written in order compassionately to provide role models for disciples and future generations.[21] Indeed, we often read in Tibetan autobiographies of how the protagonist read the life stories of other masters and took examples and encouragement therefrom. Among the most avidly read literary genres in Tibet, autobiography and biography provide for their audience templates for self-transformation: structures, limits of possibility, caveats.

The autobiography equally is supposed to inspire faith, and this provides another reason that the subject of self-transformation will tell his or her story to others. A key subcategory of the autobiography's disciple readership is the lay disciple with wealth. This kind of reader will assimilate the exemplary lessons of the life story of self-transformation differently than will the monastic or yogin. The difficult path of self-transformation lies beyond the means of the lay patron, but, in a pattern well known in many Buddhist societies, the patron instead accumulates merit vicariously merely by having faith in the story of the virtuoso's self-transformation—and by making donations to support that person. Support comes in the form of food and supplies to retreatants in caves, resources to build monasteries or retreat centers, resources to print the literature of self-transformation, and supplies and accommodations to underwrite large ritual assemblies and courses of teaching. The entire edifice of Tibetan religion depends upon the support provided by aristocratic and govenmental patronage. This all points to a critical aspect of the externalization and communicability of self-transformation: to articulate the virtuoso's experiences is to engender the very circumstances that make self-transformation possible to begin with. In short, the articulation of experiences and realizations in autobiography presents the subject's credentials as a compelling object of support. And the receipt of such support in turn means that the self-transformation project is maintained and perpetuated.

But beyond caring for disciples and winning patrons, the account of the subject of the transformation's experiences and realizations accomplishes things that affect

the subject himself. To reiterate my point about the role of an audience, I would say that to have a credible story to tell and, importantly, to feel recognized as a master of self-transformation by others, in many ways makes it believable to that individual himself. It is a form, again, of externally granted legitimation, and it impacts critically on the subject in question's self-image and self-confidence. Consider especially the kinds of activities that such confidence from within—and recognition from without—allows the master to perform. The account of self-tranformation demonstrates the master's credentials to assume critical social and ritual roles, roles that could be said to be the main reason why self-transformation is embarked upon in the first place. For example, to have achieved virtuosity in self-transformation is deemed essential in order to be able to perform abhiṣeka, which we might consider now from the perspective of the master rather than that of the disciple, which was discussed earlier. The officiating master in an abhiṣeka must first perform a meditation of self-transformation and then sustain that self-visualization throughout the period from when the students first enter the room until the end of the ceremony.[22] This means that the lama giving the abhiṣeka is not a historical person but rather Avalokiteśvara or Vajrapanāṇi or whoever is the focus of the rite. (Or more precisely, the officiant is a combination of a historical individual and the visualized buddha/deity, although exactly how the combination works remains to be analyzed). It is essential for the disciple to have faith that the lama on the throne has *become* the buddha/deity during the rite in order to be able to believe that an authentic and effective abhiṣeka is being transmitted.

Now we should not conclude from this that self-transformation is merely a self-perpetuating circle, that is, that people receive abhiṣeka so that they may be empowered to go through the process of self-transformation so that one day they will be able to perform the rite so as to bring others onto the same path. Many other rituals beyond abhiṣeka need also to be performed by the virtuoso of self-transformation in Tibetan Buddhism. For example, all of the slew of ritual acts to invoke, propitiate, and supplicate the protective deities, performed daily both in large assemblies in the monasteries, as well as by individuals in retreat or at private shrines, require facility in revisualization of the self according to the basic sādhana system just outlined. Similarly, acts of black magic to destroy or "bind by oath" demons (read: one's enemies) are performed by the lama *qua* deity. In such cases, transformation of the self into a deity is what confers the confidence and power to perform ritual acts.

Perhaps the most dramatic ritual performed by the master of self-transformation is oracle possession, widely practiced in Tibet, including for the central Tibetan government on a daily basis.[23] This critical font of access to the omniscience of certain deities, whereby the future is predicted and advice offered for efficacious conduct, is facilitated, again, by the oracle's use of sādhana techniques. However, the means by which the oracle becomes the deity through creation-stage visualization is soon surpassed by the striking transformation that is observable from the outside when the possession sets in (or in Tibetan parlance, when the "deity descends" [*lha-babs*]). As witnessed in recent years by a few non-Tibetan observers, the oracle in possession literally expands in size, becomes strong enough to wear a crushingly heavy helmet which minutes before had to be supported by several strong monks, runs around bending swords into knots, and delivers pithy predictions and warnings

in a spookily altered voice and cadence. Then he or she collapses on the floor and reverts to conventional identity.

One could continue to catalogue the ritual functions that are fulfilled by the virtuoso of self-transformation. But most of all, I would emphasize the symbolic capital of becoming a master of self-transformation. The one who assumes the role of enacting these various ritual procedures becomes thereby the "throne-holder" (*khri-'dzin*), the "holder of the vajra" (*rdo-rje 'chang*), the "vajra teacher" (*rdo-rje slob-dpon*): these titles name the protagonist of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus beyond whatever functions are facilitated by self-transformation, there also is facilitated an abstraction about the person generically. And that is to say that self-transformation is not only a means but an end in itself, and that end is about the fundamental identity of a person.

While much of the foregoing suggested that the reason for telling the story of a virtuoso's transformation into a new identity is to serve as a sign to others of that person's credentials, I would not want to neglect the significance of the act of telling for such individuals themselves. Although the writers of *mam-thar* rarely refer to personal motivations themselves, my interviews with living members of Tibetan self-transformative traditions suggested that the process of writing about personal achievements is indeed also viewed as having value for the writer. Importantly, I was told, writing provides a record, a vehicle to remember what happened in dreams or while on retreat, and especially to assess progress over time.[24] I suspect also that there is something about the mere fact of articulation that itself provides legitimation: finding the words in which to express an experience means that it can be related to standards, to levels and schemas that are already established. This hunch is confirmed in the repeated gestures in Tibetan religious autobiographies to cite canonical passages or the biographies of previous masters, and thereby to confirm that transformative experiences can be rendered in forms that may be acknowledged and recognized.

Once again, we are led to the outer face of identity and legitimation. Whether the individual is interested in establishing an exalted identity as a model for students or for his or her own self-image, in either case it requires engagement with an already existent pantheon of identities. Self-transformation is thus a path from one identity to another, both of which either appropriate or stand in opposition — but in any event are located with respect to — names and labels and concepts and experiences that are already in the lexicon. If we are to understand the motivations and aspirations of self-transformation, then, it would seem to be fundamental that we know what those pantheons or lexicons are. I would therefore like to close my remarks with a few comments on the range of such lexicons in Tibetan religion. With the exception of the previous reference to oracle possession, I have thus far discussed Tibetan Buddhist self-transformation only in terms of the Indic sādhana system, which means that the pantheon of possible guises for the goal of self-transformation would largely be the characters of the Buddhist tantras — Cakrasamvara, Hevajra, Vajrayoginī, Vajrakīla, Yamāntaka, and so on — along with the plethora of subdeities in each of their retinues and maṇḍalas.

But there are other, competing pantheons for Tibetan Buddhist self-transformation. One is that of the Tibetan "indigenous" deities (actually we have little idea

what is truly indigenous in Tibet; at most we can attempt to refer to what was present in the seventh century C.E. when Buddhism arrived), some of whom are indeed the deities that are channeled in states of oracle possession. The story goes that Padmasambhava, the Indian master who introduced tantric Buddhism to Tibet, subdued and converted to Buddhism all of Tibet's troublesome ghosts and demons as he entered the country from the Nepalese border. In practice, this means that there are countless sādhanas and other ritual procedures in Tibetan religion that have appropriated the warrior and astrological and chthonic and ancestral Central Asian deities, in addition to the Indic ones.[25] They differ somewhat from the Indic varieties in their role in Tibetan programs of self-transformation; for one thing, their status is lower than that of the enlightened "transcendent" deities of the Buddhist pantheon, and they tend to be classed as "protectors" or "worldly" deities. Most Tibetan religious groups make ample use of deiform visualizations involving both the Indic tantric deities and the Tibetan protector or worldly deities, but the guises that are assumed in the latter cases have a different character than their Indic counterparts: they are more violent, aggressive, and openly competitive with rivals; in short, less encumbered by Buddhist morality. These are the guises assumed for the purposes of sectarian as well as interpersonal rivalries. They are considered more efficacious for accomplishing "action" (the term here often implies specifically wrathful ritual activites such as controlling or subduing or "liberating," a euphemism for killing, usually amounting to a set of sympathetic magic techniques aimed at sending a demon or ghost to the pure lands), whereas the Indic Buddhist deities are more appropriate for salvific self-transformation per se.

Yet another array of choices for self-transformation is provided by a practitioner's lineage of previous masters. Lineage is of major import in Tibetan religion, serving to define identity by virtue of who the individual's teachers and forebears are. Note that here the guises are human and in most cases what we would call historical persons, and usually Tibetan rather than Indic. Sādhana techniques similar to those already described are also used to access these human identities, in the particular forms known as *guru-sādhana* or *guruyoga*, whereby the meditator visualizes him- or herself as merging with the guru. The guru also communicates with the practitioner in dreams and visions, as do the Indic tantric deities. But there are also other avenues for self-transformation when the human lineage serves as the lexicon, avenues that are not available when the practice focuses upon transhistorical buddhas or deities. Beyond visualizing the body, speech, and mind of the guru, sādhana-style, an individual can identify with the historical guru's personality, assume some of his or her names, assume and carry on the guru's writing projects, assume and carry on other visionary, educational, or building projects, and especially, take on the guru's institutional position and property.

Identification and self-transformation as governed by the figure of the historical guru are established on two kinds of grounds. The first is constituted when the disciple is brought into a lineage and becomes a recipient of abhiṣeka initiations and other kinds of teaching transmissions that stretch back to the guru in question. To receive such transmission not only allows the student to embark on a path of deity- or guru-governed self-transformation, as we have already seen, but also connects that person intimately to the line of masters who have been engaged on that path

themselves. The aspirant contacts those masters' physical relics in abhiṣeka and participates in their experiences and mental states via the specially engineered moments of transmission. Certainly the appropriation of the personality characteristics of the patriarchs, such as their style of teaching, or sense of mastery and charisma, or knowledge, or writing, can be explicitly claimed by members of a lineage, as well as discerned by others. Such continuities in lineage personalities are not uncommon topics of conversation in contemporary Tibetan circles.

The other ground for identification with masters of the past is that an individual is recognized as the reincarnation of the master. This is the basis of the famous "tulku" system of Tibetan Buddhism; the Dalai Lama is the most celebrated example, but there are many, many others. Here it is not a matter of connection through ritual communication, but rather a psychological and existential one, a continuity of consciousness and habitual traces, albeit one that is confirmed ritually, institutionally, and politically. People usually acquire such an identity by virtue of an investigation carried out by monastic officials on several child candidates a few years after the death of a monastic hierarch; one child is chosen after a battery of tests reveals traces of memory of the past life as the hierarch in question. Once again, this is a case of self-transformation effected primarily from the outside: when the team of experts decides a boy "is" the reincarnation of the past Dalai Lama, for example, the processional, educational, institutional, and especially political regalia that follow virtually lock the boy into this new identity for the rest of his life. But identity as a reincarnated master can also be achieved through means relatively free of public control, at least at first, when individuals "remember" their past lives as certain prominent gurus by virtue of special meditative visions. Such memories and the claims to authority and status they entail are often contested and even dismissed. The effort that is devoted to "proving" nonetheless the veracity of the memory—the detail in which the recollective visions are recounted, for example, and the way that they are often reinforced in the remembered topos by events of abhiṣeka, another kind of legitimating device for self-transformation that we have studied—demonstrates how much must be at stake in the Tibetan context when people attempt to establish identity with their authoritative forebears.

In my own work on the writing of autobiography among Tibetan visionaries, I have been especially struck by the tensions if not contradictions that these complex presumptions about identity ultimately entail. The individual who can lay claim to successful self-transformation—be it through the visualization procedures of deity sādhana, connection with a powerful lineage through ritual transmission, or personal or public remembering of a past life as an eminent member of such a lineage—that individual is thereby empowered to occupy a monastic throne, teach masses of students, become the object of faithful devotion, dispense blessings, and receive the support and patronage of the aristocracy. Such a person becomes a cultural hero and will be someone of whom outstanding personality traits are expected. He (and sometimes, she) will be distinguished by notable compasssion for others, or a distinctive sense of humor, or a special sense of majesty. Often, striking claims of eccentric individuality and independence are made autobiographically by such persons. And yet one cannot but help but notice that this creative path of self-realization is made possible only by a matrix of expectations, connections, and canonized forms

of personal identity that, by virtue of their very canonical status, would seem to undercut the striking claims to autonomy that they produce. The foregoing study of self-transformation in terms of the complex dialectic between inner experience and outer recognition traces out a comparable tension. Within the particular economy of self-representation and religious authority in Tibetan Buddhism, such tensions are hardly a liability, however, but are rather what create the space for—and the limits of—the arena of self-transformation, facilitating an exceptional level of personal self-realization and sustaining a state-level theocracy in one and the same stroke.

Notes

1. On the relations between politics and religion in Tibetan history, see Shakabpa 1967 and Goldstein 1989. On the patron-priest relation, see Petech 1990 and Wylie 1990.

2. A good summary in English of tantric practice from a general Tibetan Buddhist perspective is Yeshe 1987; on transformation in particular, see, e.g., 16–17 and ch. 11.

3. Other ritualized and well-defined kinds of Buddhist self-transformation could also usefully be explored in this context, including the "taking of refuge" ceremony, monastic vows, bodhisattva vow ceremonies, and tantric initiations (Skt. *abhiṣekha*). Most of these procedures include, among other things, the conferring of a new name and various kinds of physical signs that mark a change in personal identity. A basic source for Indic sādhanas is Bhattacharyya 1925–1928. A general Tibetan theory of sādhana practice is translated in Guenther 1987.

4. A technical discussion of the differences between the first and third types of visualization is in Lessing and Wayman 1980, 163–171. An example of visualization of a deity on the head is in Gyatso 1997.

5. One of the best studies of these notions is Collins 1982.

6. Despite its importance and considerable interest, there are few reliable or comprehensive scholarly studies of the voluminous Tibetan materials on *utpattikrama* and its pair, *sampannakrama*, in English. On the former, some information may be gleaned from Guenther 1987, 74–103, and Yeshe 1987, ch. 11. I offer an overview of some of the principles of the practice in Gyatso 1998, 188–190.

7. A few Tārā sādhanas are translated in Wilshire 1986, 331–350.

8. One of the few detailed accounts of these practices from a Tibetan perspective in English is Geshe Kelsang Gyatso 1982. See also Gyatso 1998, 90–197; and Yeshe 1987, ch. 12. For the larger Indic background of *sampannakrama* yoga, see Kvaerne 1975.

9. As stressed, for example, by the tantric exegete Klong-chen-pa (fourteenth century) in his work *bSam gtan ngal gso*, the root text of which has been translated by Guenther 1975–1976, 2.84–90.

10. The life story of Milarepa illustrates this point in much detail: Evans-Wentz 1969.

11. For Tibetan overviews of abhiṣeka, see Lessing and Wayman 1980 and Rangdröl 1993.

12. Again, the life story of Milarepa, albeit in significant part fictional, provides much insight on the sociology of Tibetan abhiṣeka practices.

13. I have personally witnessed people being turned away for many such reasons in the course of my studies among Tibetan refugee and Himalayan communities in northern India and Nepal over the last ten years.

14. I have studied the Tibetan concern with authoritative source in Gyatso 1998 and 1993.

15. As stressed at length in Rangdröl 1993, 15ff.

16. Gyatso 1999.

17. See Martin 1992, 270.
18. Casey 1991, 4–28.
19. See, for example, Lessing and Wayman 1980, 201–203; Guenther 1975–1976, 106–108.
20. Gyatso 1998.
21. Ibid.
22. Lessing and Wayman 1980, 275ff.
23. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, ch. 21 and 22.
24. Gyatso 1998, 103.
25. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956.

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SARA SVIRI

The Self and Its Transformation in Ṣūfīsm

With Special Reference to Early Literature

The question "What is the 'self' that is transformed?" has, from the perspective of medieval Arabic literature, an intriguing semantic aspect. The immediate equivalent for "self" in Ṣūfī literature, with which this essay is concerned, is *nafs*. This, as the dictionaries will testify, is a homonym for a variety of meanings, ranging from "soul" and "spirit" to "appetite" and "desire." It also designates reflexivity; thus, *nafsī* denotes "myself," *bi-nafsihi*—"by himself," and so on. This equivocalness made possible the employment of the term in two disparate meanings by two disciplines, both interested in psychological questions. In the psycho-philosophical terminology that was coined during the process of translating Greek into Arabic, *nafs* became the equivalent of *psyche* (or *anima*) and was hence understood as *soul*, essentially a subtle and transcendent substance.[1] Thus, for example, for Ibn Sīnā, one of the most influential Islamic philosophers of the Middle Ages, "*nafs*, in relation to 'matter' in which it resides . . . deserves to be called 'form' (*ṣūra*), and in relation to the perfection of a species which it brings about . . . deserves to be called 'perfection' (*kamāl*)."[2] In Ṣūfī psychology, on the other hand, *nafs* became, primarily, the designator of a negative, earth-bound fiery entity that needs to be constantly condemned and watched over.[3] In addition, the reflexive aspect of the term yielded a discourse on *nafs* that was centered around egocentricity and selfishness. Although classical Ṣūfīsm and medieval Islamic philosophy represent two autonomous disciplines, each with its own distinct terminology, neither can be said to have been impervious to the other. Awareness of the two contrasting meanings of *nafs* is evident, for example, from the following definition offered by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), a prolific popularizer of Ṣūfīsm who was well versed in (albeit critical of) philosophy:

> The term *nafs* has two meanings. The one relates to that entity in man in which the power of anger and the power of desire are found. This use is the most prevalent among the Ṣūfīs. For them *nafs* means the element in man that includes all the blameworthy qualities. . . . The second meaning is [that of] the subtle entity . . . that is man's true reality, soul (*nafs* [!]) and essence.[4]

In what follows, I propose to discuss the transformation of *nafs* in the sense "most prevalent among Ṣūfīs," namely, the inferior aspect of the human psycho-physiological constitution. It should be noted that modern scholarship seldom reflects al-Ghazālī's fine awareness of the ambiguity of *nafs*. Perhaps this is due to the fact that scholars are often interested in either one or the other of the two disciplines in which *nafs* is used as a *terminus technicus*. To those interested in philosophical psychology, there is nothing odd in rendering *nafs* as *soul* or even as *spirit*. In a recent volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, for example, the author explains that "since the two concepts of *nafs* and *rūḥ* are so closely connected, both will be considered here," namely, under *Nafs*.[5] For those accustomed to Ṣūfī vocabulary, however, such rendering fails to convey the overriding negative understanding of *nafs* in Ṣūfī mystical psychology.[6] Therefore, it is hardly surprising that most translators of Ṣūfī texts exhibit inconsistency and uncertainty when they encounter the term *nafs*: should it be rendered soul, lower soul, carnal soul, appetitive soul, self, lower self, impulsive self, instinctual self, ego—or any combination of these options?[7]

A negative view of *nafs* is intrinsic not only to Ṣūfīs but also to traditional authors with an ascetic or moralistic leaning. A prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth nabawī*) often quoted in pietistic literature sums up this attitude succinctly: "Your worst enemy is the *nafs* that lies between your sides" (*a'dā 'aduwwika al-nafs bayna janbayka*).[8] Since *nafs* is considered an enemy, war has to be declared against it. But the *nafs*, in this imagery of battling and enmity, does not stand alone. The scope of pietistic militancy is widened when other "enemies" enter the war zone. These, traditionally, are Satan (*al-shayṭān, Iblīs*), who often, as in Gnostic and Christian writings, is designated the Adversary (*al-'aduww*), and the base inclination (*al-hawā*).[9] Against this triad, the devout Muslim, Ṣūfī or otherwise, is urged to wage the 'greater holy-war' (*al-jihād al-akbar*).[10]

Adverse as the *nafs* may be, it is seen by Ṣūfī authors as a component of human nature that can be transformed. In fact, the ideal of the transformation of the self and its bad qualities is a *sine qua non* in Ṣūfīsm. It stems from an outlook that couples the somber characterization of *nafs* with an optimistic view of change. It is that very culpable nature of man that in the end, when transformed, ennobles him. Static goodness, such as that of angels, ranks inferior to that which man acquires through repentance and effort.[11]

A simplified, yet adequate, definition of Ṣūfīsm could easily be "a practical and devotional path that leads to the transformation of the self from its lowly instinctual nature to the ultimate state of subsistence in God—a state in which all blameworthy traits fall away." It is from this vantage point that Ṣūfī authors see the transformation of qualities, *tabdīl al-akhlāq*, as the process whereby a holy man, the friend of God, is forged out of faulty human nature. Significantly, one of the highest ranks in the mystical hierarchy is reserved for the *abdāl*, the "Substitutes." These are holy men and women,[12] usually forty in number, without whom the world cannot subsist. The term *abdāl* derives from a verbal root, *b d l*, that denotes transposition and substitution. Hence, according to the standard explanation, the *abdāl* are so called because whenever one of them dies, God substitutes (*baddala*) another for him. Yet within Ṣūfī circles an additional explanation circulated: they are so called because they have transformed (*baddalū*) their base qualities.[13]

The idea of the transformation of the self has been understood to rest upon three Qur'ānic verses which address *nafs* explicitly. The first verse addresses the *nafs* as "that which incites to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammāra bil-sū'*; 12:53); in the second, it is designated "the *nafs* that blames" (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*; 75:2); and in the third it is described as "the serene self" (*al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*; 89:27). These three designations, culled from disjoint locations, were seen, when juxtaposed in the foregoing order, as a paradigm for the progressive transformation of the lower self through effort, discipline, introspection, and, ultimately, divine grace, into the desired state of fulfillment.[14] This Qur'ānic paradigm gave rise to two distinct attitudes. One is eschatological, exhibited mainly in the pietistic literature, in which the apotheosis of *nafs* comes about when, after the death of the body, the serene self, in everlasting paradisiacal bliss, will reap the fruit of its former devotion.[15] The other is mystical, in which the thrust of the transformative process is in what is experienced and achieved during one's lifetime. According to the latter, the image of serenity implies a self stripped of worldly attachments and empty of fears or hopes, fulfilled simply by its existential, hence timeless, proximity to God.

There has existed in Islam since its formative period a rich literature advocating moral attitudes and ascetic norms of behavior and, consequently, interested in the topic of harnessing self and desires. This homiletic literature, however, is hardly interested in a deeper psychological transformation of the self, a transformation that will allow an epiphanic experience. Hence, in spite of many overlaps, one can clearly discern two separate corpora of literature: pietistic and mystical. The extracts chosen to be highlighted and discussed in what follows, mostly from the writings of eighth- and ninth-century authors, exhibit a psycho-mystical discourse on self transformation that allows us to conjecture that mystical disciplines, designed to transform the *nafs* in order to prepare it for a transcendental encounter, existed independently of ascetic streams from very early on.

Since the pioneering studies of Ignaz Goldziher, there has been a tendency in Islamic scholarship to claim that asceticism (*zuhd*), in relation to mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), is an early, lesser stage, thus suggesting a gradual, linear transition from the former type of religious attitude to the latter.[16] I doubt that such an outlook is accurate, either historically or phenomenologically. Rather, a distinction can be made between a pietistic approach that upholds asceticism as an idealized way of life and a mystical approach that sees asceticism as a mere technique, often a temporary technique, whereby inner transformation can be achieved. As an idealized way of life, it is attested in a rich pietistic literature extant in independent works[17] or as part of large compilations.[18] This pietistic literature and the ascetic tendencies that it reflects can hardly be confined to the limits of the early centuries of Islamic history only.[19] At the same time, there has existed in Islam, from very early on, a mystical literature in which ascetic vocabulary and imagery have been used in the service of something that lies beyond the ascetic ideal. Asceticism, in this context, becomes no more than a station, a stage—*manzila*, *maqām*—on a mystical journey (*sayr*) or path (*ṭarīqa*), whose destination far outreaches it. It is this early discourse on the progressive stages of self transformation, leading to a mystical mode of existence, that will engage us in what follows.

The Physiology of *nafs*

Ṣūfī authors teach that the *nafs* is a vital energy that resides and operates within the body and is associated with the downward-pulling energies of earth and earthly inclinations. It is identified as an earth-bound force counteracting the spiritual energy (*rūḥ*) that pulls man upward toward his ideal state of being.[20] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, a ninth-century mystic with a keen interest in the physiology of *nafs*, describes it as the life force that enlivened the clay (*ṭīna*) from which Adam was created. Although it was activated by the breath of God, it is essentially an earthly life force inherent in the clay, or soil, itself. After materializing, it attached itself to the body's hollow interior (*jawf*). There it is located in the lungs, from where it moves about with the breath (*nafas*). It spreads with immense speed throughout the body via the blood vessels and interacts with other organic forces of a similar nature. One such force is desire (*shahwa*), which is seen by al-Tirmidhī as an organic substance with a capacity for growth, movement, and fermentation. The origin of desire is the fire of hell, whence it retains a kinship to joy (*faraḥ*), attractive loveliness (*zīna*), and the base inclination (*hawā*). Desire, too, takes residence in the body. It is located in the vicinity of *nafs*, within a subtle organ near the lungs. Both *nafs* and desire are characterized as hot, fiery winds that, when mobilized, awaken and kindle one another. The fast movement of *nafs* in the bloodstream produces pleasure (*ladhdha*), another animated energy on which the *nafs* feeds. Pleasure interacts with the base inclination (*hawā*), and this cluster of impulses, filled with vital, organic energy, reaches the bodily organs by means of the fast movement of the *nafs* through the bloodstream. One example of the consequence of such meeting of energies is the gushing forth of the seminal fluid (*mā' al-ṣulb*).[21]

Al-Tirmidhī's analysis of the dynamics of the *nafs* and its association with pleasure, desire, and the base inclination is consistent, though hardly orderly or formal. Here, as a taste, is an extract, condensed from a detailed, and somewhat convoluted, description:

> When the clay became alive, the *nafs* emerged, established herself within the interior of the body and exhaled. . . . The *nafs* resides in the lungs and from here she breathes (*tatanaffasu*) due to the life force inherent in her. . . . Between the heart and the lung God placed a subtle vessel from where a whizzing wind flows through the blood vessels. The origin of this wind is the fire [of hell], it is created from this fire. . . . In this fire joy and loveliness are located. He called [this wind] desire. . . . When, due to an incidental memory, this wind stirs up in its vessel, the *nafs* senses it and her [own] fire is kindled. . . . The *nafs* is a turbid wind whose origin is earthy; she spreads within the blood-vessels and fills them up in less than an eye-blink. . . . The origin of the base inclination (*hawā*) is the breath (*nafas*) of fire. When this breath emerges from the fire [of hell], it carries with it desires [with which hell-fire is surrounded][22] that contain joy (*faraḥ*) and attractive loveliness (*zīna*), and these it delivers to the *nafs*. Joy and loveliness arouse the *nafs*, due to the hot wind that is placed by her side in that subtle vessel [i.e., desire], and, in less than an eye-blink, she spreads within the blood vessels that pervade the whole body, from head to foot. From her movement within the body the *nafs* derives pleasure (*ladhdha*) and is cheered up. Hence her desire and pleasure.[23]

This explicit description makes it clear that the power of *nafs* in Ṣūfī awareness is far from abstract or lofty. Its reality is seen as an unrelenting aspect of human organic nature, enmeshed in man's physical and psychological makeup. It is part and parcel of every physical activity, in fact, of each exhalation. The indestructibility of this life force captivated the imagination of a later Ṣūfī. Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 1221), a revered visionary from Central Asia, offers the following analogy in his autobiographical *Breaths of Beauty and Revelations of Majesty:*

> The *nafs* is alive, she does not die, she resembles a viper. Slaughter it, pulverize its head into tiny bits, take off its skin, cook its flesh, eat it, and then, years later, when you place [the skin] in the heat of the sun — it will move. So also the *nafs:* when she unites with the fires of the base inclination and desire, as well as with the Satanic fires, she, too, moves. And from then on she contaminates the bodily organs and robs them of their strength and nourishment till she thrives.[24]

The Training of the Self

Al-Shaqīq al-Balkhī's Acts of Worship

Descriptions of the means whereby the self is trained and harnessed can be culled from early texts. One of the earliest texts that describe the training of the *nafs* as part of a process of transformation is ascribed to Shaqīq al-Balkhī, a second/eighth-century mystic from Transoxania.[25] In a short treatise entitled *Rules of Conduct for Acts of Worship* (*Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*),[26] this early mystic uses a rudimentary yet paradigmatic terminology and structure whose focus is a carefully designed discipline of self-transformation. By "acts of worship" (*ʿibādāt*), he refers not to ritualistic acts that the religious law requires of all believers, but rather to supererogatory acts that "the people of sincerity" (*ahl al-ṣidq*), those who seek to transform the darkness (*ẓulma*) of their nature into light (*nūr*), take upon themselves voluntarily. Evidently, not all believers are thus inclined.[27] Evidently, too, the religious law by itself does not provide a sufficient transformative discipline.[28] In his treatise, Shaqīq outlines, with precision and authority that seem to be borne out by cumulative experience, the different practices that have to be exercised at each of four progressive stages: abstention (*zuhd*), fear (*khawf*), longing for paradise (*al-shawq ilā-l-janna*), and, ultimately, love of God (*al-maḥabba li-llāh*).[29]

A clear pattern that runs through all the stages emerges: (1) the discipline prescribed changes with each phase of the transformative journey; (2) the period assigned for each stage is limited to forty days, at the end of which the practices pertaining to it may be abandoned; (3) the attainment of each practice is described as inner lights located within the heart; (4) parallel to the inner transformation, each type of practice produces a corresponding change in the practitioner's character and behavior; (5) the transformative process starts off as an act of will but is complemented and reaches its completion by an act of divine grace; (6) the attainment of higher stages overrides, but does not cancel out, that of lesser ones; (7) the personal transformation brings about changes in the practitioner's social status.

Abstention The first step in the stage of "abstention" is to exercise hunger, or even, for those who are exceptionally keen, total fasting. Hunger is designed to train the self to cut off her desire for superfluous food and drink. By extension, this practice leads to a reduction not only in the consumption of food but also in the self's overall desire for superfluous things (*fuḍūl*). Eventually, when abstention is practiced continuously for forty days, the *nafs* becomes detached from its previous attraction to all worldly things. Consequently, the first signs of transformation occur:

> When he proceeds to train his self day after day in this manner and to educate her to cut off her desire for superfluous things, [God] plucks this desire out of his heart. On each day that he spends in this fashion, God lifts the darkness out of his heart and replaces it with light. After forty days, no darkness that has not been replaced by light remains in his heart. Then his heart becomes a glowing light, and the light of abstention settles within him. (18, ll. 6–10)[30]

The term of forty days is noteworthy. It defines the purposive and expedient nature of the ascetic exercise. Eating little, going through periods of fasting, are not in themselves meritorious, and they do not convey an ascetic ideal that should be adhered to indefinitely; they are a temporary means to an end. Shaqīq's attitude is evinced from this permissive advice he gives: "When [the seeker] reaches the end of this stage, if he wishes he may keep up the practices pertaining to it until the day he dies, or, if he wishes, he may move on to the next stage" (18, ll. 17–8).[31] This is *askesis* or *riyāḍa*—the Arabic equivalent of the Greek term—proper. The training of the *nafs* is modeled upon any course of training, religious or otherwise, that demands a rigorous commitment and periodical abstinence. The merit lies not in the training or in the abstinence per se, but in the objective they are designed to achieve. In terms that have become characteristic of Ṣūfīsm, the objective of the *askesis* is the transformation of the dark energies governing human nature into luminous ones that herald a spiritual existence. The means whereby this objective is achieved is to deny the self that to which she has been accustomed.[32] The preceding extracts state clearly, that, when the inner transformation occurs, the light of abstention (*nūr al-zuhd*), which is an inner rather than outer state, overrides the need for external ascetic practices. Here, in Shaqīq's words, is what this transformation, even at this early stage, amounts to:

> [The seeker] then abides in the world, but he does not make the world his wish as other people do, he does not compete for it as other people compete, he does not aim to indulge in its pleasures, and he does not find joy in its companionship. It becomes minor in his eyes. He casts it aside. He relaxes from the weariness of pursuing [worldly things] and he makes his self relax from all such weariness. When you see him, he is always strong, energetic, content, self-sufficient [*ghanī*, lit.: rich], non-worrying, dignified. His face radiates the brightness of worshippers and his heart [contains] the light of ascetics. He has no need for the world apart from his basic nourishment. He is better than others. (18, ll. 11–16)

Why forty days? Forty days is a paradigmatic unit of time allowing a course of training to take effect and changes to come about. In Ṣūfīsm, it has become institutionalized in the practice of *chilla*, forty days of seclusion and fasting that a disciple is sometimes bidden to commit himself or herself to by his or her master.[33] Ascetic

practices of forty days are, no doubt, pre-Islamic. The biblical origin of this temporal unit, reflected in the Qur'ānic Tales of the Prophets, is acknowledged by Ṣūfī authors. Thus, for example, in *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (*The Unveiling of the Veiled*), a popular Ṣūfī manual of the eleventh century, the author, 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī, writes: "The forty days' fast (*chilla*) of the saints are derived from the fast of Moses (Kor. vii, 138).[34] When the saints desire to hear the word of God spiritually, they remain fasting for forty days. After thirty days have passed they rub their teeth; then they fast ten days more, and God speaks to their hearts."[35] Hujwīrī's explanation of the effect of the forty days' practice is blatantly physiological, almost medical; in other words, therapeutic and transformative: "Now, hearing the word of God is not compatible with the subsistence of the natural temperament: therefore the four humors must be deprived of food and drink for forty days in order that they may be utterly subdued, and that the purity of love and the subtlety of the spirit may hold absolute sway."[36]

Fear After completing the term by which the state of inner *zuhd* is achieved, the seeker moves on to the stage of fear (*khawf*). The practice here begins with contemplating death and educating the *nafs* to fear God intensely.[37] This practice results in an immediate softening of the heart.[38] Moreover, when the practice is done with sincerity and intention, God rewards it by transforming the initial, self-willed fear into fear on another scale, that which Shaqīq calls *mahāba*, awe, an intense emotion that God himself implants within the heart. When awe settles within the heart, it goes on growing and engendering light. After forty days, the effect of the inner light of awe becomes apparent on the practitioner's face, and he, too, becomes an object of awe. Shaqīq implies that the fear that such a man generates is more a feeling of reverence than an anxiety of malevolence.

Awe produces an emotional and behavioral profile which is different from that of abstention. At this stage in the transformative process, the seeker is overwhelmed with grief. He is tearful, distressed, sleepless, anxious; he prays constantly and finds no pleasure in social engagements or in life in general. At the same time, in spite of being distraught, he holds on fast to his spiritual practice. In Shaqīq's words: "All this time his remembrance [of God] (*dhikr*) does not abate and his gratitude (*shukr*) does not diminish. Fear has dispelled indolence. He does not get weary, he does not sit idle, he does not tire" (p. 19, ll. 11–13). For the beholder, says Shaqīq, this is a very high stage. During these two practices, each lasting forty days, the sincere seeker has established for himself an elevated rank in the public's eye. This social observation suggests, no doubt, that, as a by-product of his effort, the seeker becomes a charismatic, a holy man. "If he wishes," Shaqīq repeats his former advice, "he can hold on to it till the day he dies; if he wishes, he can move on, without losing his former achievements, to the stage of 'longing for paradise.' "

Longing for Paradise For Shaqīq, this stage, if adhered to for another term of forty days, results in an even loftier transformation. The practice here is to contemplate the everlasting bliss of paradise and its delights, such as the black-eyed beauties (*al-ḥūr al-ʿīn*), that await the blessed ones. As earlier, here too: when the practitioner, in earnest commitment, disciplines his self to endure the practice of longing, God re-

wards him by implanting the light of longing in his heart. The stronger he holds on to the practice, the stronger this inner light becomes. Eventually, after forty days, "[God] brings the light of longing in his heart to completion, so that the heart becomes overwhelmed by longing. [This state takes over] and makes him forget his [former state of] fear, so now he does not need to maintain it anymore, although the light of fear does not diminish nor does it leave him" (20, ll. 1–4). The behavioral pattern of the seeker at this stage again changes. His current features are those of generosity, attentiveness, sincerity, compassion, detachment; life's struggles and vicissitudes do not grieve or bother him. Thus, "When you see him, he is always laughing, rejoicing in what he has. He is neither miserly nor bountiful, he is not a slanderer, he does not indulge in faultfinding, and does not speak ill of people. He is the one [known as] the constantly fasting, the constantly standing up [at night for prayer] (*al-ṣawwām al-qawwām*)" (20, ll. 7–8). This state exhibits light-hearted features that differ from the gloominess of the previous state of fear. As for its hierarchical position, it is "a stage higher and more noble than the stage of fear" (20, l. 9). But here, too, its temporality is clearly stated in the by now familiar advice, "If he wishes, he may stay in this stage till he dies; and if he wishes, he may move on to the stage of the love of God (*al-maḥabba lillāh*)" (l. 10).

Love of God The highest, most noble, and most splendid is the stage of loving God. Not everyone attains this stage. It is reserved for those whose heart has become strengthened by certitude (*yaqīn*) and whose acts have been purified of blemishes and sins. The light of love overrides all the lights of the previous stages, though they do not disappear or diminish. The intensity of the love for God that fills the heart outshines the lesser lights of abstention, fear, and longing, so that the seeker becomes oblivious of them. This stage starts with the following practice: the seeker motivates his heart to love all that God loves and to detest all that God detests. The beginning of this stage, too, is a self-willed practice that, when carried out with sincerity, is complemented with a corresponding God-inspired love whose light increases in the heart. Outwardly, this results in the practitioner himself becoming an object of love for both angels and human beings. The consolidation of this state brings about further changes in character and behavior: he becomes beloved, noble, intimate, mature, gentle, composed, and magnanimous, and he refrains from vile deeds and avoids leadership (*ri'āsa*).[39] "When you see him, he is always smiling, patient, dignified, courteous, tactful, never gloomy, always bearing good news, avoiding sin, opposing liars, is never heard [to say anything] except what God loves. He is loved by all who hear him or see him. This is due to God's love for him" (21, ll. 4–7).

Life with God A short addendum by Shaqīq to *Ādāb al-ʿibādāt*, entitled *A Chapter on the Stages of Sincerity* (*Bāb manāzil al-ṣidq*) and described by the editor as "version abrégée,"[40] highlights the mystical climax of this discipline. Here the author emphasizes the fact that not all who follow this path arrive at its ultimate destination. The purpose of this emphasis seems to be the wish to distinguish between three groups of seekers: those who do not go beyond the (combined) stage of ab-

stention and fear, who are apparently attached to their asceticism; those who do not go beyond the stage of longing for paradise, who seem to be attached to their eschatological aspirations; and those who move beyond all these stages and reach God. Of the latter, Shaqīq says:

> They become [contained] within God's repose and mercy. Their hearts become attached to their Lord, and, when absorbed in Him, they delight in secret discourse with Him (*munājātihi*). In their hearts they are presented with His mercy and kindness for which they aspire. It is He who takes over their hearts. It is He who, in their lifetime (*fī-l-dunyā*) becomes their companion, their peace of mind, their joy and the delight of their hearts. (21, l. 20–22, l.3)

This last paragraph describes the culmination of the process of transformation in a way that has become characteristic of Ṣūfī lore. In fact, Shaqīq's two treatises as a whole contain most, if not all, of the ingredients of later descriptions. Written in a condensed yet authoritative form, they reflect a structured prescription that cannot be seen as simply "immédiate."[41] Shaqīq's description of the stages of transformation, when compared with later compilations, may lack in detail and vocabulary, but it does not lack a perspective based on sustained experience.

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's Ranks of Worshippers

A somewhat more expanded description, based on a terminology similar albeit not identical to that of Shaqīq's, was presented by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in *The Ranks of Worshippers According to Their Worship* (*Manāzil al-ʿibād min al-ʿibāda*).[42] In a florid style, and with copious references to Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, al-Tirmidhī outlines seven progressive stages (*manāzil*):[43] repentance (*tawba*), abstention (*zuhd*), fighting the *nafs* (*ʿadāwat al-nafs*), love (*maḥabba*), cutting off the base inclination (*qaṭʿ al-hawā*), fear (*khashya*), and proximity [to God] (*qurba*). He, too, suggests an interaction between human discipline and divine help where the balance is tipped in favor of the latter; and for him, too, the ultimate stage is a mystical proximity to God rather than an eschatological bliss. According to al-Tirmidhī's scheme, too, the locus of inner transformation is the heart in which God invests his lights, and its external manifestation is the changes that take place in character, behavior, and social esteem. Finally, he, too, suggests that only a few pass through all stages and reach the ultimate, mystical, state of nearness to God. Most seekers remain attached to one of the lesser stages. Accordingly, al-Tirmidhī distinguishes between three categories of men: the mystic, whom he describes as "confined by God" (*ḥabīs allāh*); the "intermingled" (*mukhallaṭ*),[44] who is confined by desires (*ḥabīs al-shahawāt*), and the infidel, who is confined by Satan (*ḥabīs al-shayṭān*) (103, ll. 9–10). Here is a passage culled from his description of those few who make it to the seventh stage:

> God has servants who have crossed the [sixth station] crying out for Him, seeking refuge in Him from the tyranny of the base inclination, for it is alive in them. God then looks at them with esteem, since He knows how utterly sincere they are in their devotion to Him. He then lifts up the veil from them and reveals to them His Glory, and all intermediaries between Him and them are then cut off. He demol-

> ishes the desires of their selves, and their inclinations collapse lifeless. . . . At this point God takes command over their affairs. He places them under His wing and, for the rest of their lives, makes them responsible for His affairs. He [Himself] educates and watches over them and does not delegate this to anyone of His creation. . . . They stand in front of their Lord looking out for His decrees [that unfold in] the vicissitudes [of their lives], and they go through them in joy and cheerfulness more swiftly than an arrow. [This is] because their inclinations and selves had died and were then revived in God. They are free and noble, the freemen of the Compassionate one (*muḥarrarū al-raḥmān*).[45] He has freed them from enslavement to their inclination and has released them from its captivity. . . . He joined them and they became joined, the life [of inner struggle] expired and they stopped observing the self. In the seas of knowledge they surrender to Him seeking His companionship, fluttering under His government. [They are] in the great Courtyard[46] till they become strong by Him . . . and glorified in His glory. And they become intoxicated by His favor.[47]

These prescriptions stem from a relativistic outlook on spiritual achievement and moral merit. The beginning of the transformative journey is observed from the vantage point of its end. Each stage is but a gateway to a higher one. The achievements at each stage are prone to becoming mechanical and as such, from the point of view of their transformative energy, degenerative or worthless. The seekers are exposed at every stage of the journey to the danger of self-identification; that is to say, the *nafs*, rather than being defeated by the ascetic or the devotional experiences, ascribes them to itself and might become gratified and inflated.[48] Yet an end is envisaged, a stage at which the seeker can relax and give over his constant vigilance for a true mystical experience. He then reaches a stage that is beyond the arena of human effort. In fact, the transformation here is characterized by the ease with which acts of worship that had previously demanded combative effort are now fulfilled. At this stage the practitioner seems to be consumed by the intoxicating power of an intimate relationship with God. This intimacy, which reveals itself in polar feelings of love and awe, manipulates him to such an extent that the natural energies and the earthly, or fiery, temptations fall away without effort on his part. This vision of the apex of the transformative process that runs through most Ṣūfī works, whether early or late, is apparent, for example, in the following passage by Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz, a ninth-century mystic from Baghdad:

> Know, that those who have attained God and are near to Him, who have in truth tasted the love of God . . . have [gone through the stages of] piety, abstinence, perseverance, sincerity, truthfulness, trust, love, longing, intimacy and other good qualities. . . . All this is with them, dwelling in their natures, hidden in their heart of hearts. . . . This is their nourishment and their routine. . . . Having attained [all these stages and qualities], they no longer feel worship and practice to be an effort, since it dwells within them at all times and in every state. . . . And even in performing their religious duties they experience neither heaviness nor exertion, for their hearts have become overwhelmed by God's nearness. Thus they worship Him without burden or labor. . . . Their hearts are occupied only with God, for they have been overcome by God's nearness and love, by the longing for Him, the fear of Him, their reverence [for Him] and their exaltation of Him.[49]

Formulae of Ascension

Beyond the disciplinary stages that address the psychological and ascetic aspects of self-transformation, there exist, according to Ṣūfī authors, further transcendental stages that are experienced, mystically, in the realms of the divine. These transcendent mystical stages—I name them so because they still retain a progressive outlook—are seldom described in detail, unless in (often later) visionary literature of the type written by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā.[50] In early writings, however, as well as in the didactic compilatory literature of the tenth and eleventh centuries, there seems to be a tendency to condense these progressive stages into formulae, rather than descriptions, of ascent. The following statement by Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz, recorded by al-Qushayrī, is a fine example of such a formulaic description:

> When God befriends one of His servants, He opens for him the gate of Remembrance (*dhikr*). When he finds pleasure in Remembrance, He opens for Him the gate of Nearness (*qurb*). Then He lifts him up to the assemblies of Intimacy with Him (*al-uns bihi*). Then He seats him on the throne of Oneness (*tawḥīd*). Then He lifts up the veils in front of him and takes him into the abode of Singularity (*fardāniyya*) and reveals to him His Majesty and Might (*al-jalāl wal-'aẓama*). When his sight falls on God's Majesty and Might, he remains without inclination (*hawā*). Then the servant becomes chronically lost [in God] (*zaminan fāniyan*) and he remains within God's protection. He then becomes free from the claims of his self.[51]

The ascending stages according to this formula start with the practice of remembrance (*dhikr*).[52] Based on a Qur'ānic verse, remembrance of God is understood to motivate God's remembrance of the seeker: "Remember Me and I shall remember you" (2:152). From this conscious endeavor ensue, as divine acts, mystical states in which the seeker loses all initiative and is totally passive: he is taken effortlessly into the divine realms of nearness, intimacy, oneness, singularity, majesty, and might. When he experiences the numinosity of these states, or stages, the transformation of his self becomes complete. The self and its allies, it seems, are incapable of subsisting in such experiential altitudes. In the preceding citation, the verbs *baqiya*—"he remains without inclination"—and *faniya*—"he is lost" allude to the complementary states of *fanā'* and *baqā'*, annihilation and subsistence, which are, according to most authors, among the highest mystical states to be attained or recorded.[53]

The passive voice is highly suggestive in this type of description. It represents those stages in the transformative journey in which the initiative has been taken away from the seeker. In contrast to the ascetic phases in which he conducted an active war with his self by means of determination and effort, he now takes no active part in the process through which he is shuffled. He has become, as the Ṣūfī idiom goes, "like a corpse in the hands of the washers." In *Sīrat al-awliyā'*, the Journey of the Friends of God, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī describes these ultimate stages in the following dynamic way:

> [God] places [the friend] at a rank, on condition that he should stay put till he is straightened. When, in the place of Nearness (*maḥall al-qurba*), he adheres to this condition and does not wish to carry out any act, he is transferred to the realm of

> Might (*mulk al-jabarūt*) to be straightened. There, his self is vanquished and subdued by the power of Might till she withers and becomes humble. From there he is transferred to the realm of Sovereignty (*mulk al-sulṭān*) to be improved. . . . From there he is transferred to the realm of Majesty (*mulk al-jalāl*) to be educated, from there he is transferred to the realm of Beauty (*mulk al-jamāl*) to be cleansed, then to the realm of Magnificence (*mulk al-ʿaẓama*) to be purified, then to the realm of Splendor (*mulk al-bahā'*) to be perfumed, then to the realm of Joy (*mulk al-bahja*) to be expanded, then to the realm of Awe (*mulk al-hayba*) to be reared, then to the realm of Compassion (*mulk al-raḥma*) to be moistened and strengthened and encouraged, then to the realm of Singularity (*mulk al-fardiyya*) to be nourished — Kindness nourishes him, Gentleness embraces him and holds him, and Love draws him near. Longing brings him close and then draws him near, then brings him close. [God's] Will brings him to Him, and then the most Gracious and Powerful welcomes him. He brings him near, then draws him close, then brings him near, then draws him close, then rejects him, then educates him, then communes with him, then lets go of him, then grips him. [From then on], wherever he is, he is in His Grip. . . . When he reaches this place, all attributes end, and all discourse and expressions end. This is the ultimate arrival place of the hearts and minds.[54]

Although this can be seen as a somewhat expanded description of ascent, it is still a schematic one that condenses the last transformative mystical phases of the journey into a formulaic sequence. The transposition from one divine realm to another does not seem to be capricious or random. It is designed, through a combination of shock and affection, to bring about a fundamental change in the seeker's mode of existence. Each realm has its specific transformative impact. But throughout the duration of these vacillating experiences, the seeker must remain completely passive. His own self cannot participate in the process, because, in these last stages of transformation, it becomes annulled and powerless, taken over by a transcendent agent.

As for the new mode of existence in the wake of the experience, Ṣūfī literature suggests that, for the friends of God, the *awliyā'*, those few who reach the ultimate stages, it is manifested in the coming together, in their daily conduct, of the ordinary and the transcendent.[55] This mode of being is exemplified by a *ḥadīth qudsī*, an extra-Qur'ānic divine dictum, which is probably the most frequently recorded tradition in Ṣūfī literature. According to this well-documented tradition, God says:

> My servant does not come near to me by performing [anything but?] my commandments, but he comes [ever] near[er] to me by performing voluntary acts of worship (*nawāfil*) so that I love him. And when I love him, I become his ear, his sight, his tongue, his hand, his foot and his heart. He hears by Me, he sees by Me, he speaks by Me, he strikes by Me, he walks by Me, he grasps by Me. This is a servant whose mind has died away in the Supreme Mind and his greedy movements have calmed down in His grip.[56]

When the full transformation is achieved, even the most elementary and ordinary activities are carried out through God and not through the *nafs*. This, it seems, is the gist of the teaching of self-transformation in which practice and discipline have a necessary — though not sufficient — role to play. It can be summed up in the following *ḥikma*, word of wisdom, of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, a thirteenth-century Egyptian Ṣūfī:

If you were to be united with Him
only after the extinction of your vices
and the effacement of your pretensions,
you would never be united with Him!
Instead, when He wants to unite you to Himself,
He covers your attribute with His Attribute
and hides your quality with His Quality.
And thus He unites you to Himself,
by virtue of what comes from Him to you,
not by virtue of what goes from you to Him.[57]

Notes

1. On *nafs* in Islamic philosophy, see, e.g., al-Kindī 1950, 273–280, al-Fārābī in Walzer 1985, 165ff., 382ff.; Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1928, 2, 325ff. (The 23rd epistle); Ibn Sīnā 1395/1975; al-ʿĀmirī in Rowson 1988, 106–107 et passim; Ibn Miskawayh 1966, 2ff. [= Zurayk 1968, 5ff.], also in Badawī 1981, 59 (Arabic text); see also Altmann and Stern 1958, 39ff., 108ff. et passim. For *nafs* as equivalent to *psyche*, see the Arabic translations of Aristotle's *De Anima* in Badawī 1954, 3–88; also Ibn al-Nadīm in Dodge 1970, 604–605; Peters 1968, 40–45; Gätje 1971; Guerrero 1992; Arnzen 1998. On the semantic complexity of the term *psyche*, see the discussion of A. M. Lorca in Nogales 1987, 33ff.

2. Ibn Sīnā in Rahman 1959, 6; cf. Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1928, 3, 278–279: "As for the *nafs*, namely the spirit (*rūḥ*), it is a celestial luminous substance . . . it does not die nor is it annihilated, it subsists eternally."

3. Note that medieval philosophy, too, recognizes inferior aspects of soul. For the tripartite division of soul/*nafs* in philosophical literature, see, e.g., Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1928, 1, 241–243 and 2, 325ff.; also Goodman 1978, 170; Ibn Ṭufayl 1936, 65–66 (=Goodman 1972, 124); see also the note that follows.

4. See al-Ghazālī 1966, 60 (ch. 6); also al-Ghazālī n.d., 3: 5 (= 3rd quarter: *Bayān maʿnā al-nafs wal-rūḥ wal-qalb wal-ʿaql.*); cf. Al-Qushayrī 1410/1990, 86–87: "the *nafs* of a thing, in ordinary language, means its existence (*wujūd*). But . . . the [Ṣūfīs] . . . mean by *nafs* those characteristics of man that are deficient and those of his qualities and deeds that are condemnable." Note the tendency of some later Ṣūfī authors to synthesize philosophical and Ṣufī terminologies in their discourse on *nafs* — see, e.g., Shihāb al-Din al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) 1969, 116ff.; Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) 1919, 95–96, and 1990, 331 (para. 399).

5. See Calverley 1993 and especially 881, sec. 5. This article is, in fact, a reprint, with bibliographical updating (by I. R. Netton), from the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* — see *EI*, 1st ed., vol. 3, 827–830; see also Calverley 1943.

6. See, however, the fine discussion on the complexity of the term *nafs* in the mystical teaching of Sahl al-Tustarī, a third-century Ṣūfī, in Böwering 1980, 243 ff., and note the references cited in nn. 48–50; see also Schimmel 1975, 112ff. et passim; for a "negative" *psyche* versus a "positive" *pneuma* in Gnosticism, see van Ess 1961, 31ff., and cf. Jonas 1963, 124.

7. See, for example, von Schlegell 1990, 97, and Sviri 1995, 280; note also the earlier translation here of al-Ghazālī 1966, 60 (n. 4).

8. See al-Bayhaqī 1987, 156–157, and cf. 163: "He who fights a holy war is he who fights his self" (*al-mujāhid man jāhada nafsahu*); see also al-Muḥāsibī 1924, 47; al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1947, 26, and 1988, 76, and the references cited there; al-Ghazālī n.d., 3:5.

9. See, for example, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1947, 44: "accordingly, 'Umar said in his ser-

mon: 'The Adversary is with this world; he lies in ambush with the base inclination, and employs his craftiness by means of desires' "; cf. Van Ess 1961, 57ff. For a comparative study of Satan as the Adversary, see Russell 1977, 200ff.; Altmann 1945; Awn 1983.

10. For the prophetic tradition on which the distinction between the lesser holy war (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*) and the greater war relies, see Gramlich 1994 (vol. 2), 32 (32.46–47); also al-Hujwīrī 1936, 200; cf. Arberry 1979, 88 (ch. 40); on Ṣūfī "psychomachia" and its antecedents in late antiquity, see Radtke, "Psychomachia," 1992, 135ff.

11. See, e.g., al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1947, 78: "Angels are devoid of desires, limbs, bodies, hollow [parts] and needs. They need no food, no drink, and no clothes. . . . They are thus liberated from the harms and needs that beset human beings, as well as from the tricks of the Adversary. In accordance with [divine] government (*tadbīr*), God created them through His saying, "Be!" His dealings with them are in the realm of Might (*mulk al-jabarūt*) and their locations (*maqāwim*) are in the realm of Majesty (*mulk al-jalāl*). As for us, He brought us into creation by His hand, and His dealings with us are in the realm of Compassion and Mercy (*mulk al-ra'fa wal-raḥma*), and our locations are in the realm of Love (*mulk al-maḥabba*). Angels are bound by one state only which they never leave nor are they ever moved out of. But human beings . . . are moved from one state to another, and all their states are service [to God]" (for the unusual plural form *maqāwim*, cf. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 37, = Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 96–97]); cf. also al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1878, 16, and note the prophetic tradition (1.5), "The believer is nobler [in the eyes] of God than the [most] intimate angels" (*inna -l-mu'min akram ʿalā -llāh min al-malā'ika al-muqarrabīn*), for a version of which, see Wensinck 1967, 6, 3; see also al-Muḥāsibī, 1940, 208–209; al-Hujwīrī 1976, 239–241; cf., however, al-Ghazālī 1971, 45 [= 1992, 3], also Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1928, 1, 359–360.

12. For women as abdāl, see, e.g., Ibn al-ʿArabī 1990, 46–47; al-Suyūṭī 1933, 10–11.

13. See, e.g., al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1878, 70 (bottom): "They were named *abdāl* for two reasons: firstly, because whenever one of them dies God replaces him with another (*abdala makānahu*) to complete the forty. And secondly, because they have transformed (*baddalū*) their bad qualities and have trained their selves till the beauty of their qualities became the ornaments of their actions"; cf. Al-Makkī 1310/1893, 86, ll. 12–14: "The seeker will not become a Substitute (*badal*) unless he substitutes (*yubaddilu*) the attributes of sovereignty (*rubūbiyya*) with the attributes of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*), the qualities of demons with the characteristics of believers, the nature of beasts (*bahā'im*) with the characteristics of pneumatics (*rūḥāniyyūn*). . . . [Only] then will he become a close Substitute (*fa-ʿindahā kāna badalan muqarraban*)."

14. See, e.g., al-Sulamī 1976, 70–72, and the sources mentioned in the footnotes there; also al-Makkī 1310/1893, 86, ll. 9–14 (ch. 25); al-Ghazālī n.d., 5; for a striking visionary's description, see al-Kubrā 1957, 25–26:

> the *nafs inciting to evil* . . . is dark. If remembrance [of God] falls on her, it becomes like a lamp shedding light in a dark house. Then she becomes *blaming*, for she sees that the house is full of polluted creatures, such as dogs, pigs, panthers, tigers, asses, oxen and elephants—all the hateful things in existence. Then she strives to chase them away. . . . To do so, she needs to practice the remembrance of God and to repent continuously, till the remembrance of God overpowers them and chases them away. Then she becomes close to the *serene self*, yet she must never stop striving. . . . When the divine power descends and Truth is revealed, then the *nafs* calms down.

15. See Wensinck 1932, 129 et passim; also Ibn Abī al-Dunyā 1987; Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1928, 3, 278; al-Ghazālī 1407/1987, 27–29; al-Qāḍī n.d., 41–42; al-Suyūṭī n.d., 23ff.

16. See, e.g., Goldziher 1910, 154–155 (ch. 4/5); Melchert 1996, 51–70, and note esp. 51: "A transition from Islamic asceticism to Islamic mysticism has now become a scholarly commonplace."

17. See, e.g., Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797) 1971; Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 812)—see Sezgin 1967, 1, 96–97; Asad ibn Mūsā (d. 827) 1976; Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) 1980; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 894) 1984. For more bibliographical data, see Sezgin 1967, 1, 97, 145, 153, 355f.; also al-Bayhaqī 1987, 47ff. (editor's introduction).

18. For sections and traditions on *zuhd* in canonical Ḥadīth compilations, see Wensinck 1943, 2, 348–349; for *zuhd* in non-Ṣūfī compilations, see, e.g., al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869) 1367/1948, 3, 125–202; Ibn Qutayba (d. ca 884) 1346/1928, 2, 261–375.

19. For later works on *zuhd*, see, e.g., al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066) 1987; Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201) 1987; Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) 1987.

20. See, e.g., al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 145: "Know, that the *nafs* is a consort to the spirit (*rūḥ*) in the body. Both are winds (*rīḥāni*), the one heavenly, the other earthly. The spirit is a heavenly energy (lit.: wind) [emanating] from the energy of life, and the *nafs* is an earthly energy [emanating] from the life [force] that was given to the earth"; cf. Radtke 1996, 187ff.

21. See, e.g., al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1947, 37–38.

22. According to the well-known ḥadīth, "Hell-fire is surrounded by desires" (*ḥuffat al-nār bil-shahawāt*)—see Wensinck 1936, 1, 479; see also al-Kharrāz 1937, 62; al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 145, and 1975, 183; Abdel-Kader 1962, 58 (Arabic text = 179 English trans.).

23. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1947, 34–39, and cf. 1975, 3; cf. Böwering 1980, 253ff.

24. See al-Kubrā 1957, 81 (Arabic text, para. 164).

25. On him, see al-Sulamī 1960, 54–59; Nwyia 1970, 213–231. According to al-Sulamī, a tenth/eleventh-century hagiographer, Shaqīq may have been "the first in the region of Khurāsān who talked on the science of the changing states (*aḥwāl*)" (54, 1.5).

26. This treatise was edited by Paul Nwyia in 1973, based on a Topkapı unicum manuscript. For bibliographical data and analysis, see Nwyia 1970, 213–231.

27. Hence the distinction that is often made in esoteric literature between "the general public" or "the masses" (*al-ʿāmma*) and the Ṣūfīs, sometimes referred to as the Gnostic élite (*al-khāṣṣa, ahl al-maʿrifa*)—see, e.g., al-Sarrāj 1914, 11ff. (= Eng. Abstract, 4f); also al-Suhrawardī 1978, 13–15, and Milson 1975, 34-35.

28. Hence the accusation, often leveled against Ṣūfīs and ascetics by Orthodox writers, of indulging in exaggerated practices above and beyond the prophetic *sunna*—see, e.g., Ibn al-Jawzī 1340/1921, 152ff., 159ff., 174ff., and note there the admonition of a ninth-century Ḥanbalī master against reading books by al-Muḥāsibī: "These are books of innovations and errors. Follow the tradition [of the prophet], in it you will find what will suffice you." (177) (for more details, see Smith 1935 (1977), 256).

29. Note that there exists an even earlier sketch of a progressive discipline, attributed to Ibrāhīm abn Adham (d. ca 776), who, according to al-Sulamī, was Shaqīq's teacher. Ibrāhīm ibn Adham's formula of transformation runs as follows:

> Know, that you will never reach the rank of the pious (*ṣāliḥūn*) unless you overcome six obstacles. First, that you close the gate of pleasure and open the gate of constriction; second, that you close the gate of pride and open the gate of humility; third, that you close the gate of leisure and open the gate of effort; fourth, that you close the gate of sleep and open the gate of sleeplessness; fifth, that you close the gate of wealth and open the gate of poverty; sixth, that you close the gate of expectation and open the gate of readiness for death.

See al-Sulamī 1960, 21–22; also al-Qushayrī 1990, 98–99.

30. For Ṣūfī teachings on hunger and its merits, see, e.g., al-Makkī 1893, 1, 73, ll. 11–12: "Fasting is the key to abstaining from the world, for by it the *nafs* is denied the food and drink that she desires and enjoys" (see also Gramlich 1994, 4, 112, analytischer Index, "Fasten"); al-Qushayrī 1990, 140–144 (= von Schlegell 1990, 79–84); cf. van Ess 1961, 115ff.

31. Cf. al-Kharrāz, a third/ninth-century Ṣūfī from Baghdad, in Arberry 1937, 75 (Arabic text): "Don't you know . . . that all states and qualities are but stations (*manāzil*) in which worshippers stay for a while before they move on to other stations?" (cf. Arberry 1937 trans., 61).

32. That ascetic practices are performed in order to break behavioral patterns transpires from a saying attributed to Abū ʿAlī al-Rūdhabārī (d. 934): "Know, that the root and foundation of the war with the *nafs* is to wean her of that to which she has become accustomed"—see al-Qushayrī 1990, 99; cf. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1947, 105: "if you wean the *nafs*, she will break and will stop pestering you. . . . For the *nafs* has become used to pleasure and desire and to acting jointly with the inclination; but if you wean her, she will become weaned"; note, however, that further on, al-Tirmidhī adds a note of caution: "If, after training the *nafs*, you stop observing her, she might, as long as the desires are alive in her and the inclination is upright, return to her previous habits" (120).

33. Cf. al-Suhrawardī n.d. (chs. 26 and 27), 123ff. (= Gramlich 1978, 193ff.); also al-Kubrā 1957, 59f. (Arabic text, para. 125); see Schimmel 1975, 101, 103; for an interesting experience of *chilla* carried out and documented recently by a modern woman, see Özelsel 1996.

34. Based on Ex. 24:18 and 34:28.

35. Al-Hujwīrī 1936 (1976), 324. Abraham Maimūnī (d. 1237), the son of Moses Maimonides, observes, too, that the Ṣūfī practice of forty days' abstention from food and sleep has been modeled upon biblical figures such as David, Joshua, and in particular Moses, who says (Deut. 9:25), "So I fell down before the Lord the forty days and forty nights that I fell down" (see Rosenblatt 1935, 2, 322–323 and 394–395).

36. Al-Hujwīrī 1936 (1976), 324; cf. Böwering 1980, 259–260, citing Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896): "One who starves his carnal soul (*nafs*) diminishes his blood proportionately. In proportion to his blood that is diminished by hunger (*jūʿ*) the whispering [of the Adversary?] (*waswasa*) is cut off from the heart (*qalb*). If a fool (*majnūn*) were to starve his carnal soul he would become healthy (*ṣaḥīḥ*) [!]"; cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī 1990, 641–642.

37. For an early collection of traditions advocating the remembrance of death, see, e.g., Ibn al-Mubārak 1971, 90ff.

38. Cf. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1878, 343 (bottom): "The heart of the human being is dense and coarse, and his *nafs*, due to her innate arrogance, is impudent and defiant. When the lights of mystical knowledge (*maʿrifa*) descend, density melts away, impudence and coarseness are wiped out, and the heart becomes soft and tender." Cf. also al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 139, ll. 1–4: "When [the seeker] stops the continuous [practice of the] remembrance of God, his heart hardens. This is because remembrance includes compassion from God. . . . When compassion comes, the heart becomes moist and soft, the heat of the *nafs* dies down and that compassion which descends upon the heart pulls her up. Thus the heart's hardness and coarseness and roughness melt away."

39. For a critical description of ascetics who, in spite of their austere practices, have succumbed to, rather than harnessed, their self's desire for leadership and renown (*riʾāsa*), see al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 116–117 (= Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 93ff.); cf. Ibn al-Jawzī 1921, 161; cf. the following saying attributed to Ruwaym ibn Aḥmad (d. 915): "the self has a share in abstention from the world, because abstention entails also relaxation, praise, laudation and eminence in the eyes of people" (see al-Sarrāj 1914, 47).

40. Nwyia 1970, 215, and 1973, 21.

41. Cf., however, Nwyia 1973 [introduction, 15]: "il nous permet de remonter . . . à une époque où ce langage traduit l'expérience d'une façon immédiate . . . sans aucune reconstruction"; see also Nwyia 1970, 214.

42. This work, known also under the title *Manāzil al-qāṣidīn ilā allāh*, has been published in Cairo twice—first in 1977 by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Juyūshī, and then in 1988 by Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Sāʾiḥ. References in this paper are to the 1988 edition.

43. The term *manzila*, employed by early writers, although never totally discarded, has

been conventionally replaced by the term *maqām* (plural form *maqāmāt*). The latter has become the technical term for a stage on the mystical path achieved through effort. It is usually contrasted with *ḥāl*, a mystical state that descends as divine favor; see, e.g., al-Sarrāj 1914, 41–72; al-Hujwīrī 1936 (1976), 180–183; al-Qushayrī 1990, 56–58; al-Suhrawardī 1978, 20–21 (= Milson 1975, 38–39); cf. Nwyia 1970, 223; also Schimmel 1975, 109ff.; Sviri 1987, and esp. 337ff.

44. This term is frequently used by al-Tirmidhī to denote a seeker in whose effort the influence of the self and its associates commingles with spiritual aspirations; see, e.g., al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 48 (= Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 115), and 1878, 260 (bottom), where al-Tirmidhī states that "a little [religious] work [performed by an accomplished man] is far better than many years of toiling of the *mukhallaṭ*." For an interesting equivalent in the vocabulary of early Christian pietists (in Greek), and in particular of Pseuso-Macarius, see Stewart 1991, 169ff., and esp. 175–177; cf. also "the mixing of the two soils" (*ikhtilāṭ al-ṭīnatayn*) in Shī'ism, see Amir-Moezzi 1998, 203.

45. This is an intriguing, "reversed" association to the Qur'ānic idiom *'ibād al-raḥmān*, "the slaves of the Compassionate" (25:63), and cf. al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Masā'il ahl Sarakhs*, fifth question in Radtke, *Drei Schriften*, 1992, 144, 1.20.

46. The Arabic idiom al-Tirmidhī uses here should probably be read *al-finā'*, which is orthographically identical with *al-fanā'*, a term conventionally meaning a mystical experience of "annihilation" (see n. 53). Contrary to the editor's explanatory footnote on p. 95, *fanā'* is not current in al-Tirmidhī's vocabulary; for *finā'*, cf. al-Niffarī in Nwyia 1973, 300.

47. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1988, 93–95.

48. On the rigorous, introspective, and controversial path of blame, *malāma*, that was designed to ceaselessly fight this tendency of the *nafs*, see Sviri 1993, and on the relative merit of effort, 1997, 23.

49. Arberry 1937, 76–77 (Arabic text) and 61–62 (English trans. — modified and slightly paraphrased).

50. See n. 14; for descriptions of mystical experiences, see, for example, Corbin 1978, 76ff. and 112; on the visions and experiences of Rūzbihān Baqlī (1128–1209), see Ernst 1996, 66ff. et passim.

51. See al-Qushayrī 1990, 263.

52. On *dhikr*, see, e.g., Gardet, 1965, 230–233; de Beaurecueil 1994; Sviri 1997, 124–144.

53. See, for example, al-Hujwīrī 1976, 242ff., and note that, according to al-Hujwīrī, al-Kharrāz was the first to explain these mystical states; cf. al-Kubrā 1957, 36f, 40f, and esp. 48 (paras. 78–79, 86 and 98, Arabic section) et passim; and see Sviri 1987, 343f.

54. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 35–36 (cf. Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 94–95).

55. See, for example, the saying attributed to Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 874): "What is the most wondrous sign of the mystic? That he eats with you, drinks with you, jests with you, buys from you, sells to you, while his heart is in the Holy Kingdom. This is the most wondrous sign" (al-Sulamī 1945, 91–92).

56. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī 1992, 34 (cf. Radtke and O'Kane 1996, 92–93); cf. al-Junayd in Abdel-Kader 1962, 33 (Arabic text = 154, English trans.); see also Schimmel 1975, 43 et passim; for canonical sources, see Wensinck 1967, 6, 529.

57. Danner 1978, 79.

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MOSHE IDEL

From Platonic to Hasidic Eros

Transformations of an Idle Man's Story

The search for a transformation of human nature must surely be one of the main purposes of mystical literature. Though present in religion in general, this search for an other, better, more spiritual, perfect, omniscient, omnipotent, immortal identity motivates those religious paths that may be described as mystical more than any other factor. These transformations presuppose a quandary about the nature of reality. If reality is good, why look for something better? And if the good God created it, why did he not create us perfect from the very beginning? Transformations in fact point toward a certain duality, explicit or dormant, at the very center of reality: there is a perfect nature, which created something that is less than perfect, and its very existence invites creatures to come closer to or even become identical with this creative nature. This quandary may take extreme forms, such as Gnosticism; or it may have more moderate expressions of duality, such as Platonism and Neoplatonism; or it may be mitigated in some forms of pantheism, which reduces the gap between nature and the ideal. However, it seems that the distance is only very rarely obliterated at the creational level, that is, during the process of creation. Given this persistent distance or initial dissonance, mysticism, and mystical techniques in particular, strive to reduce the distance, sometimes even to undo it. In other words, a search for some forms of deification, or of theosis, or in more moderate forms, apotheosis, underlies the mystical pursuit. The concepts of immortality, omnipotence, or omniscience are not only forms of conceptualizing the divine in itself but also different ways of imagining the perfect nature toward which the mystic strives.

Some forms of religion and mysticism are more open toward those forms of assimilation because of a less stringent definition of the perfect nature as different, transcendental, unknown, or unattainable. According to such approaches, transformation is less radical, less difficult or extreme. Images of veils or claims of misunderstandings facilitate the transition from the seemingly nonperfect to the discovery of the truly perfect. However, if the distance is seen as greater, the process of transformation will be less a matter of dissipating a misperception of reality and more of transforming a lower reality into a higher one. In such a case, it is not a noetic reve-

lation of the identity of brahman and Ātman, nor an initiation that helps one to recognize the true nature of the soul, but the hard work of transforming something that is recognized as lower into something that is indeed higher. In these cases, break, rupture, and rebirth become dominant metaphors, linked to series of internal and external exercises intended to induce the ontic change.

In what follows, I present several forms of transformations connected to one short story, as told by a Kabbalist at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The main topic of the story is a transformation of an idle man into a saintly figure; this transformation, however, which is at the core of the story and of our analysis, is accompanied by additional changes, that cannot be dealt with in detail in this framework.

R. Isaac of Acre's Story

Let me start with some bibliographical details regarding the provenance of the text that will be the basis of our discussion. Sometime in the 1570s, a Safedian Kabbalist, R. Elijah da Vidas, composed one of the most influential books of Jewish Kabbalistic ethics: *Sefer Reshit Ḥokhmah*. This is a compendium of Kabbalistic ethics, intended to move the larger public to live a life of sanctity. Its success was astonishing: the rather voluminous book was immediately printed, abridged, translated, and widely disseminated.[1] Da Vidas drew upon a variety of Kabbalistic and ethical sources available in sixteenth-century Safed, not all of them extant now. By doing so, he saved some precious excerpts from loss or oblivion and mediated between older layers of Kabbalistic writings and the later audiences that read his book. One of these fascinating pieces is the following story, preserved out of a lost book of the late-thirteenth-century and early-fourteenth-century itinerant Kabbalist, R. Isaac ben Shmuel of Acre:

> [A] Thus we learn from one incident, written by R. Isaac of Acre, of blessed memory, who said that one day the princess came out of the bathhouse, and one of the idle people saw her and sighed a deep sigh and said: "Who would give me my wish, that I could do with her as I like!" And the princess answered and said: "That shall come to pass in the graveyard, but not here." When he heard these words he rejoiced, for he thought that she meant for him to go to the graveyard to wait for her there, and that she would come to him and he would do with her as he wished. [B] But she did not mean this, but wished to say that only there[2] great and small, young and old, despised and honored—all are equal, but not here, so that it is not possible that one of the masses should approach her. [C] So that man rose and went to the graveyard and sat there, and he fixed the thought of his intellect to her,[3] and always thought of her form. And because of his great longing for her, he removed his thoughts from everything sensual, but put them continually on the form of that woman and her beauty. Day and night, all the time, he sat there in the graveyard, there he ate and drank, and there he slept, for he said to himself, "If she does not come today, she will come tomorrow." This he did for many days, and because of his separation from the objects of sensation, and the exclusive attachment of the thought of his soul[4] to one object and his concentration[5] and his total longing, his soul was separated from the sensibilia and attached[6] itself only to the intelligibilia until it was separated from all sensibilia, including that woman herself, and it[7] was united with God.[8] And after a short time he cast off all sensibilia and he de-

> sired only the Divine Intellect, and he became a perfect servant and holy man of God, so that his prayer was heard and his blessing was beneficial to all passersby, so that all the merchants and horsemen and footsoldiers who passed by came to him to receive his blessing, until his fame spread far about. [D] Thus far is the quotation as far as it concerns us. And he went on at length concerning the high spiritual level of this ascetic. And R. Isaac of Acre wrote there in his account of the deeds of the ascetics, that he who does not desire a woman is like a donkey, or even less than one, the point being that from the objects of sensation one may apprehend the worship of God.[9]

There can be no doubt that R. Isaac of Acre was interested in mystical anecdotes and that he passionately collected them. In fact, this seems to be one of his distinctive characteristics in comparison to other early Kabbalists who were less inclined to deal with hagiography. Indeed it seems, as Amos Goldreich had pointed out, that he composed a book dedicated to this topic, entitled *Sefer Divrei ha-Yamim*,[10] now lost.

Someone haunted by historical curiosity, wishing to know when and where such a story was first committed to writing in Hebrew literature, will have a problem establishing the time and the locale of the story. R. Isaac wandered from the Galilean town of Acre, still dominated by the Crusaders, where he was a student in a yeshivah before the fall of the town to the Mameluks in 1291, to Spain. He visited Catalonia and Castile, and perhaps later on, also northern Africa. This long itinerary does not help us zero in on the area where he heard the story, though, as pointed out by Paul Fenton, there is a good reason to assume a Sufi background.[11] Unfortunately, the parable was preserved only in a truncated form, as the remark of da Vidas indicates: "Thus far is the quotation as far as it concerns us. And he went on at length." Our subsequent attempts to ponder the significance of the parable depend upon what the sixteenth-century Safedian Kabbalist selected as relevant. A truncated quote from a lost book written by an errant Kabbalist, perhaps somewhere on one of the shores of Mediterranean Sea, sometime between 1290 to 1320—these are all the reliable data we have. Moreover, I assume that there is a small, though significant, interpolation in the text, a fact that may reduce its reliability. Nevertheless, it seems that the intrinsic and historical importance of the passage deserves a sustained interpretive effort.

The Transformation of an Idle Man

The main protagonist of R. Isaac's story is an idler who becomes an ideal man. It is the possibility of this transformation that the story exemplifies, and I would like to follow the different processes involved in this transformation. Let me start with the protagonist. He is described as *Yoshev Qeranot*, namely someone who sits at the corner of the street, apparently doing nothing. I assume that for a Jewish audience this phrase means someone who does not study Torah, perhaps also someone who does not work. His basic characterization is his propensity for corporeal things: all he wishes, according to the story, is to take possession of the princess's body. The princess apparently accepts the direct approach of the idler and even agrees to meet him, though in a rather unusual place: in a cemetery—the place where all human desires are terminated; here the idler hopes that his one wish will be fulfilled. Blinded by desire, he becomes trapped in the frustrating expectation of a meeting

with a princess who never arrives. However, the process of expectation, nourished by erotic longing, has an unexpected effect: it dramatically affects his spiritual orientation. By thinking over and over on the external form of the princess, he gradually elevates himself from the corporeal to the spiritual. He is obsessed by the image of the princess, and this obsession turns into an ideé fixe. The idle man begins, malgré lui, to contemplate a form he has seen only once, and his life is changed by this short, accidental, but nevertheless fateful encounter.

In other words, we may describe the idle man as an egoist who attempts to exploit the other but then becomes altruistic, blessing and helping others. The shift from one state to another takes place in the cemetery, a place where physical possession is meaningless.

We may describe the two main changes in the status of the idle man as follows: the move in space from town to cemetery, that is, a horizontal shift, triggers a subsequent vertical shift, which leaves the corporeal entities and concentrates upon a supernal spiritual entity.

Let me document the nature and importance of this spiritual shift from other writings of R. Isaac; this approach seems to me valuable even in the case of a story which was adopted by R. Isaac from another source since the terminology used in the story reflects R. Isaac's characteristic style.[12] In his better known *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayyim*, he adduces, in the name of one of his teachers, the following tradition:

> From the wise man R. Nathan, may he live long, I heard . . . that when man leaves the vain things of this world, and constantly attaches his thought and his soul above,[13] his soul is called by the name of that supernal level which it attained, and to which it attached itself.[14] How is this so? If the soul of the practitioner of *hitbodedut* was able to apprehend and to commune with the Passive Intellect, it is called "the Passive Intellect," as if it itself were the Passive Intellect; likewise, when it ascends further and apprehends the Acquired Intellect, it becomes the Acquired Intellect; and if it merited to apprehend to the level of the Active Intellect, it itself is the Active Intellect; but if it succeeds in clinging to the Divine Intellect, then happy is its lot, for it has returned to its foundation and its source, and it is literally called the Divine Intellect, and that man shall be called a "man of God," that is, a divine man, creating worlds because behold[15] 'Rabba created a man.' "[16]

I have proposed to identify R. Nathan as a student of Abraham Abulafia, who had a disciple in Sicily named R. Nathan ben Se'adya.[17] In this quote, as in the story of the princess, we read of a spiritual ascent through which man becomes "a man of God." In both cases *hitbodedut* and *devequt* are mentioned, although in the latter case it is difficult to determine the exact relationship between the two concepts. Likewise, the supernatural qualities of the man of God are mentioned in both passages: according to R. Nathan he is "a creator of worlds,"[18] while in the parable of the princess the saint is described as one whose "prayer is heard and his blessing is efficacious"; and the end of the first quotation from *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayyim* deals with prophecy which enables the prediction of the future. Also the use of the words *maḥashevet* and *nafsho* in similar contexts may point to a shared terminology. Thus we may assume that the idle man inadvertently undergoes, in his solitary state, a process of initiation that makes him much more powerful than before. This process includes corporeal isolation and mental concentration. To a certain extent, the idle man becomes a shaman.

Examination of the passages relating to *hitbodedut* from the writings of R. Isaac of Acre indicates that its purpose was to detach the thought process from objects of sensation and to lift it up to the intelligibles or even to the highest levels of the world of intellect. The final goal of this process of ascent is to commune with God himself, as is clear from the parable of the princess. This is also true in the quotation from R. Nathan, where *devequt* to the divine intellect is mentioned. We shall have more to say about the terminological details further on.

The attainment of union with the divine intellect is, however, not the ultimate achievement of the former idler. By becoming devoted to God, the idle man becomes a center of pilgrimage; he is visited by itinerant figures, liminal persons who may be understood as constituting a *communitas*. In other words, by moving outside society, the recluse becomes the center of another, mobile society. Beginning as an idler unable to act, the protagonist becomes an ideal man, omnipotent, a thaumaturge cultivated by many for his powers. Thus, the horizontal move outside society is followed by a vertical move, which invites another horizontal move, that of those who reintegrate the recluse into their society by becoming his disciples or by seeking out his occult powers. Or, to formulate it differently: the initial social marginality of the protagonist invites the liminality of the first horizontal move, which underlies the centrality of the second horizontal move.

How are these new powers achieved? *Hitbodedut* was part of a technique of concentration and attachment of the human soul to God. However, according to R. Isaac of Acre, *hitbodedut* is also able to serve as a means of drawing the divine pleroma down into the human soul:

> When man separates himself from the objects of sensation and concentrates[19] and removes all the powers of his intellective soul from them, but gives them a powerful elevation in order to perceive Divinity, his thoughts shall draw down the abundance from above and it shall come to reside in his soul. And that which is written, "Once in each month" is to hint to the practitioner of *hitbodedut* that his withdrawal from all objects of sensation must not be absolute, but rather "half to God and half to yourselves," which is also the secret of the half-*sheqel*, "the rich man should not add, nor the poor man subtract, from the half-a-*sheqel*,"[20] whose esoteric meaning is "half of one's soul,"[21] for *sheqel* alludes to the soul.[22]

The implication of this passage is that R. Isaac, or his source, understood the ascent of thought to the source of beauty during isolation as capable of causing the descent of the abundance. Such a combination of spirituality and magic is found elsewhere in R. Isaac of Acre and is part of a more comprehensive mystico-magical model that recurs in Jewish mysticism.[23] It is this coupling of spiritual ascent with magical power that distinguishes the Platonic and some Neoplatonic descriptions of the ascent of mind to God from the Kabbalist ones, which also incorporated magical effects. So, for example, we learn from one Hebrew version of Plotinus's description of the ascent on high as transmitted in the Middle Ages:

> Aristotle[24] has said: Sometimes I become self-centered and remove my body and I was as if I am a spiritual substance, without a body. And I saw the beauty and the splendor and I became amazed and astonished. [Then] I knew that I am part of the parts of the supernal world,[25] the perfect and the sublime, and I am an active being [or animal]. When this became certain to me, I ascended in my thought from this

> world to the Divine Cause [*ha-ʿIllah ha-ʾElohit*] and I was there as if I were situated within it and united in it and united with it, and I was higher than the entire intellectual world and I was seeing myself as if standing within the world of the divine intellect, as if I were united within it and united with it, as if I am standing in this supreme and divine state.[26]

As in R. Isaac's story, isolation and concentration precede the ascent on high and the adherence to the highest cause after transcending the intellectual realm. Despite the similarity between the two passages and the availability of the Plotinian passage to Jewish thinkers since the thirteenth century,[27] my point is not to posit direct historical influence on R. Isaac or on his source but to stress the difference between them. Plotinus, unlike some of his followers such as Jamblicus, was concerned with mystical attainment, despising the acquisition of magical power. Thus, though Platonic in origin, and even Neoplatonic in its description of the ultimate trans-intellectual attainment, the story reported by R. Isaac integrates elements that may start with late Neoplatonism, which could have interpreted Plato in a magical—in their own terminology, "theurgical"—manner, thus opening the Platonic discourse to a more magical interpretation and adding a "practical" sequel to the spiritual attainment. Similarly Platonic in origin is the distinction, implicit in the story, between lovers of body and lovers of wisdom.[28] In fact the story suggests such a development, though it attempts to move beyond it toward the lover of God, reminiscent of Plato.

By resorting to the term *ʾIsh* in the context of a relation between the male mystic and a female, the daughter of the king, R. Isaac opens up the possibility to understand the male aspect of man as pertinent for his encounter with God, represented by a female entity, the Shekhinah. In fact, it is in his writings that the biblical *ʾIsh ha-ʾElohim* is understood, following some earlier Kabbalistic traditions, as pointing to a human male in relation to a divine female.[29] Unlike the views found in Diotima's speech and in some forms of Kabbalistic description of relating to God during mystical experience as female, R. Isaac seems to be determined to stay with the original male gender of the mystic during mystical experience. One of the common transformations during mystical experiences involves the feeling of male mystics that they are, or become for a while, females in relation to the supernal power envisioned as male. According to a recent interpretation of Plato's theory of eros, this may also be the case in the *Symposium*.[30] In Kabbalistic literature, this is the case with Abraham Abulafia,[31] and I am confident that R. Isaac was acquainted with Abulafia's theories and was even influenced by them.[32] Here, however, he followed a theosophical conceptualization of the nature of mystical experience. The preference for an understanding of the mystic as male is also coherent with the more powerful image that emerges from the final stage of the story, where the idle man become a shaman.

Who Is the Princess?

The second protagonist of the story, the daughter of the king, also undergoes a transformation. One might well ask whether we can identify the exact nature of the princess in this story. She is portrayed exclusively as an earthly entity, but this level of understanding seems to me insufficient. In passage D quoted above from *Reshit Hokhmah* in the name of R. Isaac, he states that "from the sensual one must under-

stand the nature of divine worship" — all this in the context of lust for a woman. Concentration on an unfulfilled erotic desire causes the soul to leave the world of the senses, that is, the physical form of the princess, and to cling to intelligibles, and afterward to God himself. In his *Me'irat 'Einayyim*, R. Isaac of Acre writes: "It is not like your thoughts in the objects of sensation, but it speaks of the *intelligibilia*, which are commanded by the *'atarah*. The letter *'ayin* is the initial letter of the word *'atarah* [crown], which corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Malkhut*, which is the *Shekhinah*."[33] This Kabbalist identifies, therefore, the *intelligibilia* with the *Shekhinah*. Furthermore, immediately following the passage just quoted he adds: "see the parable of the princess, etc., as explained in *Keter Shem Tov* [by R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon]: 'the Torah [spoke here of] the unification of *'atarah*.' "[34] The princess mentioned here is dealt with in R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's book in the context of a Talmudic parable dealing with the unification of the lower *sefirah*.[35] It seems that from the identification of the crown as the princess, referring to the *sefirah* of *Malkhut*, which is in turn identified with the intellect, one may infer that in the parable we find a withdrawal from the objects of sensation and a distancing from physical form, while attachment to the intellect is seen as cleaving to the supernal, ideal princess — the last, feminine *sefirah*, the *Shekhinah*,[36] and then to God himself. This clinging may stand for the "divine worship" in R. Isaac's story, and the practitioner of concentration who clings to God may stand for the "perfect servant." If the nexus between the "daughter of the king" as a symbol for the last *sefirah* and the corporeal protagonist of the story under scrutiny here is pertinent to the way we should understand the story, we may assume that R. Isaac conceptualized these two topics as pointing to an embodiment of the spiritual within the corporeal, in a manner representative of Platonic thought.

Prima facie, the sexual desire of the idle man in the opening of the parable undergoes a transformation — one can even speak about sublimation — during which corporeal desire has been riveted to a spiritual devotion and then to God. However, some details from the other writings of R. Isaac[37] allow a more precise reading: devotion to the intelligibles, a term betraying Aristotelian impact, is to be understood as devotion to the *Shekhinah*, conceived as the last divine manifestation. Indeed, there can be no doubt that this term, as well as the phrase "divine intellect," are additions to a story borrowed from an alien source; they reflect the standard terminology of R. Isaac in all his extant writings, where the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah was combined with philosophical terminology on one side, and ecstatic elements on the other. The occurrence of the philosophical terms *murgashot* and *muskalot*, the ideals of *devequt*, the issue of *hitbodedut* as mental concentration, as well as Sufi elements such as the contemplation of beauty as a mystical technique — all these point to a synthesis between a philosophical approach and Sufi and ecstatic types of mysticism. Though it is possible to determine that this synthesis took place already at the end of the thirteenth century, it seems that some of the texts which reflect such an encounter are lost, including R. Isaac's book from which R. Elijah da Vidas quoted the above parable. It is interesting to observe that this encounter, which in my opinion took place in the late thirteenth century in the Land of Israel,[38] had an influence on the later sixteenth-century Safedian Kabbalah, which was instrumental in preserving it and transmitting it to the Hasidic masters, as we shall see.

Let us return, however, to the content of R. Isaac's parable. The nonencounter

with the princess has nevertheless alerted the idle man that he should search for the source of her beauty, or of beauty generally, in its ultimate source, the supernal feminine. In fact, although the idle man never fulfils his desire, his story is not one of frustration but rather of a substitution of spiritual beauty for the material one; the encounter is purposely postponed in time by a divine providence but is at the same time elevated to another, more "sublime," level. However low the starting point for such a spiritual journey may be, it is nevertheless indispensable; the lower beauty is, as R. Isaac of Acre is quoted by da Vidas at the end, the stimulus for the religious search. In fact, a detailed analysis of the peculiar formulations used by this Kabbalist has shown that the princess was no less than the *Shekhinah,* the divine presence.[39] Thus, a certain immanentist attitude is perceptible, which had profound implications on the way the much later Hasidic masters understood the story.

Before leaving the princess for a while, let me consider the way she is presented. According to segment B, the intention of the princess was not to educate the idle man by attracting him to a place where he would be transformed by his unfulfilled expectation, but to instruct him in matters of human hierarchy: the graveyard alone is the place where a man of humble origin becomes equal to a princess. Thus what she had in mind was not a delay, even less an invitation, but a rejection. This "social" reading will transform the sequel into the accidental effect of an incidental meeting. The whole story achieves a happy end generated by sheer misunderstanding. Such a reading will assume that the plain sense of the story is the only important one, as the princess is a corporeal lady defending her noble status by expressing a philosophical reflection on the egalitarian nature of the graveyard.

However, this "social" reading of the story seems problematic. Segment B, starting with "But," may represent a moralistic insertion that defends the image of the princess against her apparent readiness to engage so easily with an erotic offer. In fact, the erotic advance of the idle man is not condemned—either by the princess or by the formulations in the sequel. On the contrary: segment D assumes that desire for a woman is necessary for attaining the perfection of divine worship. Also the description of the female as a princess seems to indicate her special status: in fact, every feminine figure could fulfill the function of becoming an obsessive image for an idle man. Resorting to the appellation *Bat Melekh,* R. Isaac invites the readers of a Kabbalistic book to speculate about a special status of the mundane woman as representative of a supernal feminine entity. Let me therefore suggest that someone, perhaps even R. Isaac himself, inserted segment B in order to allow a double reading of the story: on the plainest level it is a matter of human hierarchy that relegates the audacious idle man to an even more marginal status than earlier. On another level, his lust triggers an adventure that has its own logic, because it has been premeditated: the princess is none other than the *Shekhinah,* whose advice is both a rejection and an invitation. After all, as suggested above, he did meet the spiritual counterpart of the princess. This double reading of a nonbiblical story, which R. Isaac adopted from a non-Jewish source, is not unique but can be demonstrated also from another, similar, instance.[40]

Let me insist for a moment on the possibility of reading the story as involving a meeting with the spiritual princess at the end. The mundane interpretation claims that only in the graveyard are all things equal—all this as an answer to the idle

man's erotic advances, which remain corporeally unfulfilled. However, if the term *'Ish 'Elohim* is understood as pointing, as it did in other sources, to the husband of the *Shekhinah*, this erotic meeting does nevertheless take place. Moreover, the resort to the ideal of *devequt* assumes a cleaving or adherence, an experience that implies an equation between the two elements involved in this encounter. In other words, the *Shekhinah* invited the idle man to the cemetery when she was embodied in a princess; she is then visited by the intellect of the ascetic, which ascends to her spiritual realm. An immanentistic view of the *Shekhinah* as embodied in the princess is a trigger for the mental ascent to God.

Last, but not least: Why meet in a cemetery? The social answer apparently solves the quandary. If we nevertheless stick to a spiritual interpretation, which assumes a certain premeditation to mystical experience, this answer is not sufficient. I would like to suggest the possibility of an affinity between the spiritual renascence of the idle man and his invitation to the graveyard. According to many religious traditions, widespread in Hellenistic sources from late antiquity, in Christianity, and in Judaism, the theme of burial is both a symbol and part of a process of spiritual transformation; these themes have been analyzed in detail by Dov Sdan and Morton Smith.[41] Indeed, the idle man does not die; neither do many of the mystics undergoing a symbolic burial in order to be regenerated. However, his connection to the cemetery is quite evident, and this fact invites the possibility, though not the certainty, that this nexus between burial and rebirth may be the reason for selecting the cemetery as the scene for a story emphasizing a spiritual renascence. One last remark on the cemetery: according to Jewish tradition this is not a very salient place for reaching a mystical experience of the divine[42] or for performing miracles or blessing people. The very occurrence of this theme supports the thesis of an alien source.

Some Possible Greek Sources

I have addressed the possible manner in which R. Isaac of Acre could explain this passage to another Kabbalist. It is doubtful that he was aware of its original Platonic source, or if this would have mattered to him. According to a passage he quotes as received tradition, Plato was an ambiguous figure, though still far better than the totally erroneous Aristotle:

> A fallacious proof . . . as the proof adduced by Plato, in order to demonstrate his opposition to the tradition [*Kabbalah*] of the prophet Jeremiah, blessed be his memory, which was a complete lie; this was acknowledged by Plato [himself] as he revealed in a dream to his disciple, after his death, as I have written in the book *Divrei ha-Yamim* and in the book *Ḥayyim de-'Orayyta*.[43]

However, what seems to me important from the point of view of religious transformations is the behavior of the princess. She is approached by a person of lower origin who makes erotic advances, which, if my assumption that segment B is an interpolation is correct, she is prepared to accept. The outcome, different indeed, does not solve the quandary about the nature of the figure that emerges from her attitude in the first encounter. In my opinion, the corporeal princess is close to the Muse Polyhymnia, presented in the Plato's *Symposium* 187d–e as embodying the *eros pan-*

demos, the source of earthy, corporeal love.[44] Rather than the celestial or the Uranian eros, which is in fact the gist of R. Isaac's story, Polyhymnia is a prostitute of superhuman nature. Rather than the Platonic dichotomy between these two diverging forms of love, R. Isaac, or his source, still following Plato's thought to a certain extent, envisioned the lower one as the representative of the higher. Material love is a manner of inciting the later and more sublime attachment to the spiritual, which cannot otherwise be attained. The transcendental Urania needs the mundane Polyhymnia in order to be loved by mortals.

There are reasons to believe that this parable has reached R. Isaac of Acre from a Sufi source.[45] Originally, it seems, however, that the parable of the princess and Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium* 210–212 are related. Nevertheless, in her famous speech, Diotima does not mention solitude at all, either in the sense of seclusion from society or in that of mental concentration. The Greek ideals of contemplation, in both their Platonic and Aristotelian versions, are less concerned with specific techniques or with shamanic attainments that would complement the contemplative achievements. Thus, a strong transformation of the story took place either in a hypothetical Sufi version or in R. Isaac's rendition of a more Platonic version.

Nevertheless, some forms of solitude are mentioned by the Muslim philosopher Averroes (1126–1198) in connection with Socrates' understanding of God:

> [And he who among them belong to the unique individuals like] Socrates, who chose isolation and separation from other people and retreat into their souls always, until those of great heart believed that through this dedication and forced contemplation of the above-mentioned forms, he shall arrive at the first form that can be apprehended.[46]

Here, as in the parable of the princess, it is possible to ascend from the intelligibles, or the forms, to the apprehension of God himself by means of solitude and mental concentration. Is the attribution of the practice of solitude to Socrates connected with the fact that he was the one to quote Diomita's comment in Plato's dialogue? In any event, Averroes's comment seems to reflect an even earlier tradition that depicted Socrates as a recluse, already cited by R. Yehudah ha-Levi.[47] It is interesting to note that there is a tradition in R. Moses Narboni's *Commentary to Sefer Ḥay Ben-Yoqtan* which reads:

> And the later ones blamed the pious one Socrates for bringing himself to lack of holiness because the difference between elitist study and the study of the masses was not clear to him. And I refer to the practitioner of *hitbodedut* from the polis, and the wholeness of his nature that he not take to his soul that which God and the prophets did not do, in making the fool and the wise man equal.[48]

Socrates is portrayed here as failing to understand the difference between the nature of the contemplation of the wise man and that of the masses, a misunderstanding that cost him his life. Thus a mystical device that will become part and parcel of ecstatic Kabbalah has been attributed to Socrates independently of Jewish mystical sources. It is this practice that is inserted into the idle man's story. Socrates, like the idle man, isolated himself from the city.

Hitpashtut

In R. Isaac's story two terms relate to a more profound spiritual experience: *hitbodedut*, mental concentration, and *devequt*, represented by the recurrent verb *DBQ*. These terms have been analyzed in the scholarly treatment of the history of Kabbalah as mysticism.[49] I would like now to address a third concept, represented four times by the verb *PShT*. This verb is crucial for understanding the spiritual transformation presented in R. Isaac's passage, and it became one of the most important terms in Hasidic mysticism. Before addressing its meaning, let me point out the contexts in which it appears. After the separation from all corporeality, *perishah mikol murgash*,[50] R. Isaac mentions the adherence or binding to the spiritual: *qeshirah*. In a parallel expression of this process, he uses the verb *nitpashtah nafsho min hamurgashot*, his soul had separated from the sensibles (and then cleaved to the *intelligibilia*). Thus, just as *DBQ* parallels *QShR*, so *HTPShT* points to *PRSh*. Also, the phrase that includes the verbs *Pashtah* and *Hashqah* conveys the same sequence of separation from *sensibilia* and aspiration toward the *intelligibilia*. We are in a dualistic system, which opposes the *sensibilia* to the *intelligibilia*; only the removal of thought from the former allows adherence to the latter. This opposition between the two acts is reminiscent of Platonic thought, and it has its more immediate sources in medieval Jewish philosophy, including Abraham Abulafia's technique of untying the knots which bind the soul to matter in order to tie it to the separated intellect.[51] Another use of this verb in a rather mystical context pointing to forms of mystical experience (Sufi, philosophical, and Kabbalistic) is found in a book from Abulafia's school, *Sefer Sha'arei Tzedeq*, which is close to R. Isaac's writings from several points of view.[52] To be sure, the later use of the verb *PShT* to indicate a form of preparation conductive to *devequt* has an additional source, a fourteenth-century Halakhic treatise known as the *Tur*, which influenced several Hasidic discussions on the topic.[53] However, there can be no doubt that R. Isaac's story, available to the Safedian Kabbalist and via his quote to a much larger audience, contributed significantly to the use of this verb in a mystical context.

At this point we should address the attainment of the *intelligibilia* by an idle man who sits alone in a cemetery, expecting, perhaps reflecting on, a woman. There is no indication of the origin of the *intelligibilia* in a process of learning. We may resort either to a Platonic explanation of anamnesis or to the assumption that separation from the *sensibilia* automatically induces the experience of adherence to the *intelligibilia*. In any case, it is pertinent to note that in the Platonic sources as well, progress from the lower to the higher ways of contemplation of beauty is not set out in detail.[54]

Contemplating Women in Eighteenth-Century Polish Hasidism

Let me demonstrate one last transformation, both induced and represented by the idler's story: that found in the religious ideals of Polish Hasidism of the eighteenth century. The idler's story represents, as we have seen, an appropriation of a narrative from alien sources. This is by no means new in medieval Jewish and non-Jewish literatures, which are replete with stories taken over from Hindu, Arabic, and Christ-

ian sources. What is characteristic of R. Isaac's story, however, is that it introduces a new ideal that can be achieved by resorting to anomian techniques. By this term I mean that neither the study of Torah or Talmud nor the performance of the commandments is mentioned or even implied in the story itself. Instead we learn about separation from society, mental concentration, spiritual separation from *sensibilia*, and contemplation, which are even more surprising if we remember that they are concerned with fixing thought on the image of a woman. A perusal of the text does not even allow us to identify the idle man as a Jew. Apparently this was also not the intention of R. Isaac, and, in my opinion, this fact indicates the alien source of the story. Thus, by resorting to anomian techniques, a non-Jewish idler may become an ideal figure, according to the view of two important Kabbalists.

Since the story was preserved in a popular ethical treatise, we may assume that it had wide circulation and that it influenced Hasidism. This revivalist movement moved away from the classical ideals of study of Torah and recommended more emotional forms of worship, gravitating around devotion, enthusiasm, union and communion with God. This shift in the center of gravity of Jewish culture in some parts of Eastern Europe is highly significant, but I cannot enter here into all its causes.

However, as the history of this story shows, the emergence of spiritual ideals which do not focus on learning is not new with the Hasidic masters. It would be ridiculous to attribute the dramatic shift characteristic of Hasidic mysticism to the effect exercised by a single story; and one might even say that the appearance of this story is to be understood much more as a prooftext for Hasidic ideals than as one of their springboards. However, in a culture as eager to find prooftexts as Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic Judaism is, the availability of such an appropriate prooftext is very helpful for a master striving to put forward new ideals.

Still, the masters who initiated the shift toward a more popular ideal, which may validate the hope of the ignoramus to attain a more sublime religious experience, did not start in a vacuum. They were consumers of ethical literature like da Vidas's *Reshit Ḥokhmah* before they became leaders of a new movement. I assume that this story, and others similar to it which cannot be discussed here,[55] somehow prepared the ground and inspired the masters who initiated Hasidism. Thus, the religious transformation of the idle man represents a microchange that was among factors which inspired and fostered a much greater social and religious change.

The name of R. Isaac is rarely mentioned in Hasidic writings. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt as to his influence. The impact of this parable on R. Jacob Joseph of Polonoy and other Hasidic masters has already been pointed out by Piekarz,[56] Pachter,[57] Gries[58] and Goldreich's important remark.[59] Indeed R. Jacob Joseph of Polonoy explicitly mentions his source, "[R. Isaac] of Acre" in a context that may be interpreted as if the Besht himself concurs with the view of the ecstatic Kabbalist:

> There is an aspect of blessing and curse not from the side of revenge because he had rebelled against the king but solely from the aspect of his not being in union with[60] the innerness of the Torah and the commandments except by the intermediary of the adorned woman with the pertinent issues, for each and every one of Israel according to his aspect and desire as it is written in the name of my teacher in the pericope *Re'eh*, see there, and it seems that it concerns another issue as it is written

> in *R[eshit] H[okhmah]*, the gate of love chapter 4 on the account of *de-min* ʿAcco, that out of the desire of the lust of women[61] he was separated from corporeality and turned to unite with the intelligibilia because of that separation, so that he united himself to Him blessed be He . . . and after he had separated from his corporeality out of his desire for this matter . . . then you should transform and intelligize the *intelligibilia* and this is the meaning of what is written: "And thou shall return to the Lord thy God"[62] by means of the same desire to which you had been accustomed through the time that you had been removed from God . . . and you will no more desire anything corporeal, which is the adorned woman, by means of the lust of this world but your soul will desire Him, blessed be He.[63]

Especially interesting is the fact that the Besht is reported to have described the protagonist of R. Isaac's story as *Hasid ʿOlam*,[64] a syntagma that may be understood as a pious man of the entire world. The very use of the term *Hasid*, which is not found in R. Isaac's story or in its immediate context, represents the transformation of the recluse into a paragon of eighteenth-century Hasidism.

However, beyond the direct quotations, which show how the anomian way of life of the solitary sage brings him to the highest religious attainment, Hasidic masters developed the attitude adopted from R. Isaac as a directive for their own life. According to a tradition found in a book of a late-eighteenth-century Hasidic author, R. Aharon Kohen of Apta: "The righteous is able to apprehend the incense, which is the holiness and the Being,[65] the presence and the *ruḥaniyyut* which maintain everything. In every place that he looks, he sees only the divine and the Being, etc."[66] In my opinion, the word "etc." found in the text stands for the contemplation of a woman, who can be conceived as veiling the divinity, the presence and the spiritual force [*ruḥaniyyut*]. The immanence of the spiritual force is here obvious, as is that of other terms like divine presence and *ḥiyyut* in other contexts. Elsewhere in the same book, we learn of

> the intention of Sarah in all her adornments and embellishments[67] only for the sake of heaven, as someone who embellishes the image of the King. Namely, there is a connection between the supernal vitality, which is the spark of the *Shekhinah*, and man. Therefore, if someone is adorning himself, he does so in order to hint at the adornment of the *Shekhinah*, and his beauty is from the splendor of the *Shekhinah*. So also he must think of the case where someone sees a beautiful and adorned person. [He must think] that this person is in the image of God, and he shall think that he sees the beauty and the adornment of the image of the King. And this was the intention of Sarah when she embellished herself. Namely, as it is said: "Go out and see, daughters of Zion,"[68] namely, go out of your corporeality and see the *ruḥaniyyut* of a thing, since the corporeality of a certain thing is only a sign [*tziyyun*] and a hint of the supernal Beauty.[69] Here, a spark of beauty out of the beauty of the world of *Tif'eret* is dwelling below. And it is incumbent to reflect [*lekhavven*] that this beauty is annihilated [*battel*] as a candle at noon, in comparison to the supernal beauty and splendor.[70]

What should concern us in the framework of this discussion is the fact that the moderate immanentist theory of R. Isaac of Acre has been developed in Hasidic discussions, which emphasize precisely the point of contemplating the beauty of the

woman in order to reach out to the supernal source of beauty. Even more important from our vantage point, the synthesis between ecstatic Kabbalah and philosophical terminology ("intelligibles") was accepted by R. Jacob Joseph in his elaboration on R. Isaac's story.[71] Thus, ecstatic descriptions sometimes adopted philosophical terminologies, a fact that adds another dimension to the phenomenological affinities between Hasidism and the ecstatic Kabbalah.[72]

Especially interesting in this context is a lengthy passage of R. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir, one of the followers of the Great Maggid, where three different attitudes about the beauty of women are described. The first revolves around a biographical incident of the Great Maggid. Here we find a rather conservative revulsion from feminine beauty, activated by an intellectual retracing of the origin of that beauty to low corporeal elements. The younger Maggid traces the source of female beauty to the aggregation of coarse, corporeal components; by his becoming aware of this ultimate source, his attraction to woman is transformed into revulsion. This type of reaction is related to the earlier stage of the Great Maggid's life, when he was a teacher in a village, and is characteristic of the more ascetic trends in Kabbalah. The second attitude, however, is more in line with the view of R. Isaac of Acre and Da Vidas that traces the source of beauty to the *Shekhinah,* who is called "the most beautiful of women, the image of all the images[73] that are reflected in Her."[74] Beauty is to be elevated to its source, and a beautiful woman reflects here below the splendor of the divine presence. The third attitude assumes that the elevation of beauty to its source causes pleasure to God, an approach that can be understood as theurgy.[75]

It is important to recall that the assumption that one can find spiritual elements within the material realm was conceived as a technique by Cordovero.[76] Thus, the immanentist views of the Hasidic masters, who discovered God in this world, should not surprise anyone acquainted with the thought of this Safedian Kabbalist and of his students. It is of special importance to mention that Cordovero's recommendation is connected in that text, as in Hasidism, to the notion of *devequt.*[77] Moreover, we should note the important shift in the ideals of Hasidism in comparison to an earlier form of Kabbalah — the Lurianic. Luria and his followers were ascetically oriented, and they had significant impact on Jewish mystics later on; but this attitude has been attenuated in Hasidism, as we shall note shortly.

Let me now address the macrochange that affected the behavior of some Hasidim as part of a restructuring of Jewish culture in some circles in Eastern Europe. In one of the most vicious critiques against Hasidim, authored by R. David of Makow, they are accused of looking at women in the market while elevating their thought to God: "They walk as idle persons and talk vain talk saying that whoever walks in the market and gazes at women elevates his thought to God, Blessed be His Name, and thus he worships God."[78] Here we find no literary hints at R. Isaac's story; mysticism has become an ethos, one concerned with eros, but an ethos nevertheless. In another famous polemical treatise of the same R. David of Makow, we find an interesting passage attributed to a Hasidic figure, a certain R. Leib Melammed. However, very serious doubts have been cast on the authenticity of this passage, which is seen by scholars as a text either forged by an opponent of Hasidism or, perhaps, written by a Frankist:

> Once I was alone with a woman and she was lying on a made bed, naked without a shirt. And she asked me to "be with her," and this is sufficient for someone who understands. But I did not heed her words and I only contemplated her flesh and her great beauty until a great holiness came upon me and told me to desist. Therefore, it is proper for a man when he sees a woman to have great desire for her, but nevertheless not actually to have an intercourse with her, but rather to contemplate her and look at her intensely and he will pass the test and rise to a great rank.[79]

In a manner reminiscent of the thirteenth-century Hasidei Ashkenaz, it is possible to withstand the erotic ordeal, and even to transform it into a religious attainment.[80] However, what is new in later Hasidism is the assumption, which I propose to trace to R. Isaac's story, that the beauty of a woman may become a trigger for ascending to the divine realm.

Prima facie, R. Isaac's story could only reinforce a propensity for asceticism: the idle man in fact becomes an ascetic, and this transformation is crucial for his religious attainment. However, the way in which the story was understood by Da Vidas should also be taken into consideration. After quoting R. Isaac's story, the Safedian Kabbalist wrote:

> From this story we should learn that whoever will desire the Torah so much that he will think, day and night, only of her and not about any of the things of this world, he will attain a wondrous degree in his soul, and will not resort to ascetic practices and fasts, because union depends only on the desire for the Torah and its love, so he will desire it as the desire for his beloved.[81]

Da Vidas recommends the classical Jewish value of love of the Torah, which renders the ascetic path unnecessary. By doing so, he may, indeed, move away from the original message of R. Isaac's story; but he is, nevertheless, close to the gist of the Platonic source, just as Diotima classifies the love of knowledge and learning as higher than that of a beautiful body.[82] Moreover, according to Da Vidas, the intense love described in the story should be directed toward God himself, and he adduces the story only in order to illustrate the possibility of an absolute dedication which should, a fortiori, be directed to God. The Besht addressed the idler's story as part of a more traditional spiritual development when he describes the woman mentioned in the story as the Torah having garments that fit each and every one of Israel, who become attracted in this way to the higher mystical attainment of union with God.[83] The Besht thus addressed the story as it was embedded in its context in Da Vidas's book, and we may assume that the nonascetic aspect just mentioned was also known to him. In other words, an anomian story had been preserved in Safed and adapted in Poland only because it had been embedded within a nomian context, which exploited an a fortiori argument in order to reinforce one of the standard mystical paths in Jewish mysticism, the study of the Torah. In any case, Da Vidas's marginalization of asceticism in the preceding passage may be seen as a plausible and significant source, or at least an antecedent, for the marginalization of ascetic Lurianic practices in Hasidism.

If this analysis is correct, the last significant transformation of Platonism in Europe is, perhaps, not represented by the Cambridge Platonists in the mid–seventeenth

century, but by the eighteenth-century humble Hasidim who were searching for beautiful women in Polish markets in order to elevate their thoughts to God.[84] As good Platonists, they loved the image of the idea within the women they contemplated.[85] In fact, the Hasidic masters inherited a very ancient theory: the Platonic discussion on the nature of love adopted, as has been pointed out by several scholars, the terminology of Greek mysteries, especially the Eleusian.[86] Diotima's speech about a vertical contemplative ascent, shaped by terminology from the mysteries, thus traveled a long horizontal way: it was apparently adopted by Muslim Sufis, from whom R. Isaac of Acre might have borrowed it when he met them somewhere in the Galilee. He took it from Asia to Western Europe, but his book made its way back to the Middle East, and this story was preserved in Safed; from there it reached Eastern Europe. This trajectory is characteristic of the way many topics in Hasidism should be understood, and it constitutes another small observation confirming Alfred Whitehead's remark that Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato.

Notes

1. See Pachter 1972, Sack 1987.
2. In the cemetery.
3. *Yiqshor maḥashevet sikhlo bah.* And see the next note.
4. *Qeshirat maḥashevet nafsho.* To my knowledge, this quite rare phrase in Jewish mysticism is found, in different forms, only in R. Isaac of Acre's writings: see, e.g., *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayyim*, ed. Amos Goldreich, (Jerusalem 1984), 218, 222, translated later. Compare also to the phrase *'Iyunei nafsho ha-maskkelet* in Judah ben Nissim 1991, 40. In this context too, R. Isaac resorts to the term *hitbodedut.*
5. *Hitbodeduto.* For R. Isaac of Acre's resort to this term as pointing to concentration of mind, see Idel 1989, 112–119.
6. *Lehidabbeq.*
7. Namely, his thought.
8. *Ve-daveqah ba-Shem Itbarakh.*
9. *Sefer Reshit Ḥokhmah, Sha'ar ha-'Ahavah*, ch. 4, ed. H. Y. Waldman (Jerusalem 1984), 1:426; Pachter 1984, 220; Pachter 1986.
10. See *Me'irat 'Einayyim*, p. 409.
11. Cf. Fenton 1987, 104 n. 218.
12. See nn. 4–5.
13. *maḥashavto ve-nafsho.* See n. 4. Perhaps we should correct the phrase here to *maḥashevet nafsho?*
14. See R. Jacob ben Sheshet, *Sefer Meshiv Devarim Nekhohim*, ed. Y. A. Vajda (Jerusalem 1969), 75, quoted almost verbatim by R. Bahya ben Asher, who assumes that this is the view shared by both philosophers and Kabbalists. See his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, ed. Ch. D. Chavel (Jerusalem 1966), 1:137–138, and see also *ibid.*, 97. See also Gottlieb 1970, 115.
15. *BT, Sanhedrin*, fol. 65a.
16. *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayyim*, 222.
17. See Idel 1989, 79–81, and 1990, 106–108. As I pointed out there, 73–75, R. Nathan had been influenced by Sufi thought, a point that may strengthen the possibility of a nexus between the last quote and the princess story.

18. See Idel 1990, 106.

19. Vajda 1956, 47, translates this word as "s'esseulant," while later, 48, he translates the term *ha-mitboded* as "le solitaire." Both these terms must be understood as referring to spiritual activity, as opposed to *perishah*, which refers to abandonment of the senses. For more on *perishah* see p. 226.

20. Ex. 30:15.

21. The numerical equivalent of *sheqel* is *nefesh* (soul), i.e., 430. The reference to division of the meditator's concerns between the sensory and intellective worlds, i.e., "half for you, half for God," is to *BT, Pesahim*, fol. 68b.

22. See *Judah ben Nissim* (Fenton 1991), 41.

23. See Idel 1995, 98–99.

24. The quote is from the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Theology of Aristotle*, I. See n. 26 here.

25. The recommendation to imagine oneself as part of the supernal world recurs in later Hasidism and may be influenced by Jewish sources that adopted Plotinian views. See, e.g., R. Yehudah Albotini's *Sullam ha-ʿAliyah*, ed. Y. E. Porush (Jerusalem, 1989), 73. I hope to address this issue in a separate study.

26. R. Shem Tov ben Joseph ibn Falaquera, second half of thirteenth-century Spain, *Sefer ha-Maʿalot*, ed. Ludwig Venetianer (Berlin, 1894), 22, paraphrasing Plotinus's *Enneads*, IV,6,8,1. This passage, in slightly different versions, had been quoted by several Jewish authors in the Middle Ages. See Fenton 1992, 27–39, esp. 31–32.

27. See Scholem 1967, 203.

28. See *Phaedo*, 255–256.

29. See R. Isaac of Acre, quoting R. Moses ben Shimon of Burgos, in *Meʾirat ʿEinayyim*, 55 and 245, and his *Sefer ʾOtzar Ḥayyim*, Ms. Sasson 919, 33. Cf. Scholem 1967, 226–227, 396 n. 143; Tishby 1989, 3:874; Liebes 1993, 15; Liebes 1994, 98.

30. See Finkelberg 1997; for the possible impact of Plato's *Symposium* on the *ʾIddra* in the *Zohar*, see Liebes 1993, 112–117.

31. See Idel 1987, 185–191.

32. See, e.g., ibid., 116–119.

33. *Meʾirat ʿEinayyim*, 214. See also in R. Isaac's observations on R. Judah ben Nissim 1991, 31, where the ten *sefirot* are described in a context that assumes their transcendence of the *intelligibilia*.

34. *Meʾirat ʿEinayyim*, ibid.

35. See *BT, Pesahim*, fol. 56a; see *Keter Shem Tov*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 111a. For the Kabbalistic use of this parable in general, see Michal Kushnir Oron, ed., R. Todros ben Joseph Abulafia's *Shaʿar Ha-Razim* (Jerusalem, 1989), 132–133 n. 468 (Hebrew).

36. *Meʾirat ʿEinayyim*, 20–21.

37. See Idel 1989, 117–118.

38. Ibid., 91–101.

39. Ibid., 117.

40. See Idel 1981.

41. See Sdan 1964 and Smith 1983. Especially important is the fact that R. Isaac himself resorted to the parable of the seed that is sown and reborn, to describe the resurrection. See Juda ben Nissim 1991, 18.

42. See Lindblom 1961.

43. *Sefer ʾOtzar Ḥayyim*, Ms. Moscow-Guenzburg 775, fol. 22a. Unfortunately, these two books of R. Isaac of Acre seem to be lost. R. Isaac claims that he heard the story from the mouth of R. David ha-Kohen, a Kabbalist and leader of Toledan Jewry in the second half of the thirteenth century, who, in his turn, heard it from his teacher, R. Moses ben Nahman, the famous Nahmanides.

44. On this concept, see Feier 1990, 301 n. 155.

45. See Fenton 1987, 104 n. 218, adducing important parallels between part D of the quote from R. Isaac about the importance of the corporeal love, and Sufi material.

46. R. Joseph Ben Shem Tov's commentary to Averroes's *'Iggeret ha-Devequt (Epistula de Conjunctione)*, Ms. Berlin 216 (Or. Qu. 681), 325. I could not find a parallel to this statement in Alon 1991.

47. See *Kuzari* I:13 and compare also R. Moses Ibn Tibbon's *Perush le-Shir ha-Shirim* (Lyck, 1874), fol. 18b.

48. Ms. Oxford 1351, fol. 125ab.

49. See nn. 4, 9.

50. See also his Hebrew translation of the text of Judah ben Nissim 1991, 20.

51. See Idel 1987, 134–137.

52. Ibid., 79–81.

53. See *'Orah Ḥayyim, Hilekhot Tefillah*, no. 98.

54. See Morgan 1990, 90.

55. See Idel, 2000.

56. Piekarz 1978, 208–209, 234. It should be noted that the trace of this passage is conspicuous also in an additional early Hasidic text, quoted in R. Jacob Joseph of Polonoy, *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, fol. 49a. See Piekarz, 1978, 261.

57. Pachter 1986, 576–577.

58. See Gries 1989, 206–207.

59. *Me'irat 'Einayyim*, 399–400.

60. *Bi-devequt.*

61. *Hesheq 'ahavat nashim.*

62. Deut. 4:30, 30:2.

63. *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), fol. 45b. See also his *Tzafnat Pa'aneah* (New York, 1976), fols. 49a, 83ab; *Ben Porat Yosef* (Pietrkov, 1884), fol. 21ab. This explicit awareness of the founders of Hasidism as to the Kabbalistic source of an immanentistic view should have been taken into consideration when Elior 1990, 35–39, claims that Hasidism has introduced a far-reaching transformation of Kabbalistic concepts and adduces as her major example the concept of disclosing the divine within this world. Likewise, Tishby 1967, 27 n. 122, mentions the theme of tracing the beauty of a beautiful woman to its supernal source in R. Barukh of Kossov, *Yesod ha-'Emunah* (Chernovitz, 1864), fol. 100a, as the view of the Great Maggid, without being aware of the discussions of either R. Jacob Joseph of Polonoy or R. Isaac of Acre.

64. Cf. *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, fol. 116b.

65. The term is *Havayah*, which may stand for the Tetragrammaton, and it seems that there is an influence of the same term as it recurs in Giqatilla's *Ginnat 'Egoz.*

66. *'Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim* (Zolkovie, 1800), fol. 9b.

67. On the embellishments of the woman that is the Torah according to the Besht in the passage from *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef*, fol. 45b, which deals with R. Isaac's story.

68. Song 3:11.

69. Compare also to discussions in R. Menahum Nahum of Chernobyl, *Me'or 'Einayyim* (Jerusalem, 1975), 6, 94, and *'Or Torah*, 26, 87, 105.

70. *'Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim*, fol. 10b; for the source of his view, see R. Dov Beer of Medzhiretch, *Sefer Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov*, ed. R. Schatz-Uffenheimer (Jerusalem, 1976), 29–30. See also R. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir, *'Or ha-Me'ir* (New York, 1954), fols. 11c–12a.

71. See *Toledot Ya'aqov Yosef*, fol. 45b.

72. Another topic that is shared by R. Isaac of Acre and Hasidism, apparently by the mediation of R. Moshe Cordovero, is the mystical translation or transformation of Enoch de-

scribed as a cobbler, into an angel; see n. 55. See meanwhile Amos Goldreich's observation in *Sefer Me'irat ʿEinayyim*, 398 n. 19; Scholem 1969, 132; Buber 1988, 87, 126–127; Wolfson 1996, 203–206. The transformation of Enoch the cobbler into Metatron is found already in traditions attributed to the Besht himself; see *Keter Shem Tov*, ed. R. Aharon ha-Kohen of Apta (Brooklyn, 1987), I, fol. 12d.

73. *Demut le-kol ha-dimiynot.* On this definition of the *Shekhinah* see *Zohar*, I, fols. 88b, 91a; Wolfson 1988, 314–315. See also Jacobs 1979, 23. See also *'Or ha-Me'ir*, fol. 137b.

74. See ibid., fol. 16cd.

75. For more on this issue, in the context of a broader analysis of R. Ze'ev Wolf's passage, see Idel 1999.

76. See the text translated and analyzed in Idel 1989, 129–130; Fenton 1987, 104 n. 218.

77. Compare, however, Elior 1990, 36.

78. Cf. R. David of Makow, in Wilensky 1970, 2:235.

79. See *Shever Posheʿim*, ibid., 2:115; see also Biale 1992, 126.

80. Biale 1992, 72–73.

81. *Reshit Ḥokhmah*, ibid., 426. See also 425.

82. See *Symposium*, 210–211. See also n. 28.

83. *Toledot Yaʿaqov Yosef*, fol. 45b.

84. See also n. 30.

85. See Vlastos 1981, 31.

86. See Morgan 1990, 97–99; Finkelberg 1997, 241.

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DON HANDELMAN

Postlude

The Interior Sociality of Self-transformation

As I grow silent and make my consciousness quiet, in keeping with an interior context of self-transformation, I become aware of a simple phenomenon that I've always known yet rarely attended to. My inner world is made up of an ongoing conversation that I continuously carry on with myself. Within myself, I talk to myself in fairly ongoing and continuous ways (just as I dream to myself while sleeping). Do you?

Through this little phenomenological experiment, I discover that I do indeed hear (or more accurately, feel or sense) voices, at times one and at times a multiplicity of voices within myself—that is, within my self. Often I am a monologue, sometimes a dialogue, sometimes more. At times, these voices address one another as "I" and "you," but at other times "I" and "I" seems more the case as they agree, contest, interpolate, laugh at, comment on, and cry with one another. They may flow together into a single voice or, indeed, different voices resonating through a variety of registers of self-engagement.[1]

Is Self-interiority Social?

I have been taught, as so many of us have, to perceive my self as individual, as some entity or quality that is uniquely I. In other words, I am supposed to be an inner being, and my interior is filled with *my* psyche, my private storehouse of being that is largely inaccessible to anyone else. In the language of my culture, my psychological space-time creates and fills this innerness. The innerness of I is distinguished and separated from the outerness of me. In the language of Meadian social psychology, the objectification of "me-ness" comes into existence through the interaction of the emerging I and the social world of others. The reflexive "me" mediates (often normatively) between my psychological innerness and my social outerness—between I and my. On my other side, the exterior, public side of my interface with the world, I am a social being, taking on, playing, playing with a large variety of personae

and roles in interaction, negotiation, and exchange with others. All this through meness. Externally, I am a social being, one among so many others.

This distinction between interiority and exteriority neatly categorizes the individual as separate from, yet interacting with and integrated within, social/cultural order—his very own being, yet one among many. In social and cultural theorizing, selfness is hidden and private yet powerfully impregnated with and motivated by the social. Or selfness may be understood almost wholly in terms of the social.[2] In psychological theorizing (and more so in the psychoanalytical), the self is more hidden and mysterious, even to one's self. One way or another, the ontic distinction between the psychological person (or the individual) and the cultural/social order is indeed one that has canonical status in the social sciences and humanities.[3] After all, I am undoubtedly a separately embodied, empirically distinct I. But if I talk to myself (and I certainly do), what might this say about this kind of distinction? How am I, and others who seem to do the same, constituted within ourselves? How social is the psyche—or rather, how is the psyche social, as I talk to myself within the (uncertain) contours of my selfness?

Is this little detail of talking to oneself within one's self a universal characteristic of human consciousness? May it tell us something about *how* it is to be human, a social being, and thus whether one is social to oneself within one's self (when the one is at times a multiplicity)? How might the undoing of the person through self-transformation be influenced by the sociality of the self? Here I want to look briefly at some of these issues refracted through the essays in this book.

The Interior Sociality of Self-transformation

I am arguing that just as selfness is social, so, too, self-transformation may be social within itself, within a (possibly quantumlike) hermeneutic of interaction inside interiority. Of the chapters in this volume, Janet Gyatso's study of self-transformation through Tibetan *sādhana* meditation is perhaps the most outwardly "social," given the emphasis placed on a dense web of institutionalized permissions, accessions, incorporations, and acknowledgments without which self-transformation cannot begin or continue. Yet this is precisely what I am not pursuing here. Gyatso's study shows us how the psyche of the acolyte exists (perhaps coexists?) on the other side of interiority, within the social exteriority of masters, lineages, and autobiographical texts. This is indeed our commonsensical understanding of the social—of the psyche in the social and, to a degree, the social in the psyche. Yet this is an understanding that accepts the interiority of the individual, the person, as psychological and the exteriority of the individual as social, with, of course, each penetrating and influencing the other. But my point is that the social exists in its own right within the constitution of psyche and selfness. Some of the material that Gyatso brings illustrates this line of thinking, and I will return to her informative study.

Shaul Shaked comments that in Sasanian Babylonia one's relationships with "invisible colleagues"—with spirits of various kinds—could be likened to an internal dialogue. "The sum of one's invisible associations is a way of at least partly characterizing oneself"—from inside oneself, I would emphasize. Shaked is referring to

one set of conditions of self-transformation. But interior interaction, and at times dialogue, is to my mind the kind of relationship that one usually has with oneself within one's selfness, one's existential sense of being. Such interior interaction may well be a foundational condition for the possibility of self-transformation.

I have suggested, indirectly, that as I talk to myself I am engaging in sociality within I-self, and that without this interior sociality, selfness may not exist. Moreover, without this inner sociality — one that could be called self-to-self — the conditions of self-transformation may not be possible. The social — exterior and interior — is always constituted by some kind of connectivity among "beings" who generate sociality through their webs of interaction with one another. In other words, the social depends upon beings attending and responding to one another. In the social world, these beings are persons. In the interior world of a person, these beings would seem to be multiple variations of selfness. It is these (uncountable?) multiple perspectives and mirrorings of selfness, generated through interior interaction, that open to the possibilities of self-transformation. Self-transformation becomes possible because the person is constituted as social in all conscious domains of interior being (and in domains, like that of lucid dreaming, that may be made conscious). To put this differently, if interior selfness is a quantumlike "domain," then self-transformation may be the coming into being of patterns of selfness that are possibilities of that very selfness, though selfness "itself" probably cannot be bounded (or defined).[4]

To put the foregoing point in (necessarily) tautological terms, change occurs when someone is changed, and someone is changed when he becomes different from what he was. Radical personal change, self-transformation, occurs when the person takes himself apart (or is taken apart), thereby opening the way to possible reconfigurations of existential being, of selfness. The conditions of selfness existing in interior variations and refractions that interact, in internal voices that contest and chorus, enable them to be further torn apart and utterly fragmented from one another as a precondition for possible, emerging reconfigurations of selfness, temporary and permanent. Reorganization may take an extreme form of oneness. This is the case in varieties of sensory deprivation, including brainwashing, and in responses to the experience of extreme pain[5] and anguish. (But this is no less the case in quieting [indeed voiding] interior interaction, and in merging with deities or models of cosmos).

Thus, as Cancik-Lindemaier tells us, after killing his wife and sons in fury, Seneca's Hercules Furens exists in the oneness of an internal void that is utterly fragmented, lacking even the elementary cohesion of memory. Hercules cannot find his sense of interior selfness without entering into dialogue with his father, Amphitryo, thereby relocating, reorientating, his interiority from the outside. (This is so in the *Herakles* of Euripides.) Then he discovers just how alien he has made his self to himself. Taken over by his own alienness, he is utterly emptied, his interior void now filled with self-loathing. This shattering and emptying of his interior interaction — his paradoxical possession of his own nullity of selfness — actually prepares him to transcend his fragmented, broken self, to continue his self-transformation.

The interior alienation of self-from-self has much in common, existentially, with that which is called "possession." In possession, inner voices and their qualities of interaction become strange to the selfness of the person who experiences them.

They are felt as alien, as not originating within selfness but entering, intruding from elsewhere, like Shaked's "invisible colleagues." What may be called possession—or self-possession, witness Hercules Furens—is a severe accentuation of the interior fragmentation of being, such that selfness loses connectivity with itself, becoming self-alienating. The inner sociality of selfness, upon which the coherence of self depends, is shattered; and one or more voices or sensations of selfness seem to live their own life. They have become independent "I's" within the self, and as such are not perceived to originate within the person whom (in part) they constitute. Moreover, their very autonomy from the interactive, inner sociality of the self (even in its fragmented condition) enables these presences to control and bind the selfness of the person invaded from within. Embodied, these presences make claims on and through the body of their presence.

As Moshe Sluhovsky shows in his chapter on spirit possession and self-transformation within the mysterious interiors of late-medieval European female mystics, the latter themselves worried about the nature of their experiences, in particular about whether the agencies who possessed them were good or evil. This fuzziness of inner identity points to just how alien the presence of internal, autonomous otherness may feel. Indeed, interiority may border on the *asocial*—selfness utterly divided against itself, perhaps paralyzed—depending on the identity given to alien presences that are uncontrollable from within and perhaps even inaccessible, presences that may be duplicitous and antagonistic, subverting even the sense of selfness that one feels is one's own.

We should ask whether the inner presence of radical otherness within selfness begins with feelings of interior asociality—as inner integuments of mutuality among aspects of selfness, through which the self refracts and experiences its own possibilities, rupture and tear. Under what sorts of conditions is interior self-alienation a process of self-paralysis or of growth? Or is one turned into the other? Exorcism, of course, is usually intended to change self-alienation into the refiguration of selfness. The successful exorcism of those whose self-volition is blocked through possession seems to depend on the reestablishment of microsociality within selfness; this is a condition of the successful reintegration of the exorcised person within the macrosociality of social order. Within selfness, the presence of alienness is itself transformed into interior sociality. The self must interact socially with itself, within itself, in order for the person to exist socially in the world. This interiority (as I listen to my-self listening to I-self listening to I) is profoundly recursive (listening to I-self listening . . .). It is this "spherical" recursiveness within interior interaction that enables selfness to constitute itself as a microworld whose interaction with the macroworld, the social world, therefore always proceeds through somaticization and requires translation and interpretation. I stress that the innerness of the person is probably no less social than is the social world.[6] So much of psychological conceptualizing has simply disregarded this perspective and continues to distinguish the self as the sole venue of the psychological being.

In this regard, I am less certain than are the editors that in the restructuring of the self, "one privileged inner spectator sometimes stands, as it were, outside or above the self, observing and isolating parts of it as subjects for transformation." They seem to suggest that there exists a reflexive metaself that within the interiority

of the person takes an external perspective on aspects of itself and their possibilities. My own feeling, in very general terms, is that if we talk to our selves, interacting within and through our sense of selfness, then the very existence of this sense of interior selfness is generated and emerges, recursively, through this ongoing, interior interaction. This continuous emergence of selfness from within its own sociality is the generation of an interior metaperspective. Recursivity shapes and reshapes selfness, braiding together the possibilities of selves that emerge from the possibilities of selves.[7] The metaperspective is processual, not structural, since interior structuring (like that of the structuring of the exterior, social world) is continuously coming into being and disappearing. Interior stability may come from the ongoing generation of variations of selfness, their harmonies and resonances, their reflections, echoes, and refractions. A processual metaperspective does not have any fixed point or entity as its epistemological fulcrum of perception. As there is no Archimedean exterior vantage point, so too, there is no interior one.[8]

To return to possession: this may be a rupturing, a disruption of the interior processuality of the continuing, ongoing formation of selfness. That is, the recursive processes through which the very sensings and feelings of selfness are generated are now ruptured or destroyed. The loss of selfness felt by the possessed may indicate the absence of coming into being continuously—the ongoing creation of horizons of becoming—that, existentially, constitutes selfness over and again. To put this a bit differently, the loss of selfness felt by the possessed is the absence of the continuousness of experience. Processuality is intimately linked to the experience of time, and time (as distinct from history) may be embedded in the very structuring of processes through which people live their exterior and interior lives.[9]

Self-transformation through Sacrifice

It is worth broadening the discussion of the reorganization of selfness to include Euripides' tragedies, *Herakles* and *Medea*, since, like Hercules Furens, the Greek Herakles and Medea kill their children, an act of profound annihilation in ancient Athens (Padel 1995, 207–209). The converse of possession is the rupturing of the connectivity between exteriority and interiority by the self-transformer, opening ways to the reorganization of selfness. This is the condition of Herakles, attacked by Lyssa, Madness, who drives him to kill his three sons and his wife. (Even Madness herself tries to resist doing this—to enter wholly into her own selfness, into madness; though once she acquiesces, she is true to her own interiority.)

Herakles had undertaken to "cleanse the earth of brutal violence" (*Herakles*, ll. 18–19)—that is, to destroy the animal and the animalistic forms that threatened civilization. He returns to Thebes at the peak of his success to find his sons, wife, and father under threat of immediate death by the tyrant of the city. Killing the tyrant, Lycus, he is lauded for his heroic deeds by the Chorus of Theban elders. As he cleanses himself from the killing with sacrifice at the altar, he himself is made animalistic by Madness and slaughters his offspring with bow and club. He embodies that which he has destroyed in the past, committing perhaps the ultimate evil of letting "out of others the blood that binds other to self," in Padel's words. Padel argues that the heart of Greek tragedy is "the knowledge that self can damage other, that

this force for damage is unlimited, mad"[10]—to the point that Herakles destroys his own descent line, his own perpetuation and futurity, a central value in an Athenian society in which kin and descent groups were crucial to the coherence and cohesion of social order.[11] Made into a wild beast, his interior sociality erased, Herakles is struck down by his self-transformation. Though he is returned to his human senses by Amphitryon, he never recovers, living on in sorrow and pain, self-extinguished, without a future, living to bury his own father but without offspring to bury *him*. He is self-transformed in a way not dealt with sufficiently in this volume—into an utterly sorrowing human being who has entered wholly and deeply into his own pain, and who exists only to suffer, his quantum selfness constricted into the fatedness of selfhood without any future that might offer the possibility of self-transcendence.

In Seneca's play, discussed by Cancik-Lindemaier, Hercules' madness may open the way to sacrifice, though not intentionally, not at the outset of *Hercules Furens*. At the very height of his powers, Hercules' bodily vision turns the exterior world alien and threatening—he attacks heaven and in turn is attacked by the furies of the underworld. His body possesses or floods his mind, his mind surrendering to the body suffused with rage, his body freed to slaughter his wife and sons without the interference of mind. His interior condition becomes akin to other extreme emotional states, like those of crying and laughing, in which mind surrenders to body and is utterly somaticized.[12] His body is no longer an embodiment but acts on its own. His selfness divides against itself in a kind of frenzied possession of selfness by selfness through which selfness becomes madness, the body free to encapsulate and nullify consciousness. The result apparently is the erasure of his interior sociality that indeed is crucial to his humanity. Hercules Furens is able to begin to rediscover this interiority only through interaction with exteriority, with the social world embodied in Amphitryo.

But it is worth considering that Hercules' self-sacrifice begins here (for self-sacrifice that generates transcendence is what I think his "mythical biography" becomes in Seneca's drama, unlike Euripides' Herakles, transformed into an all-too-human sufferer). Moreover, the pattern of self-sacrifice in Seneca's theater takes the shape of erasing the contours of something akin to David Shulman's idea of "concentric embedding"—Hercules destroys himself spherically, undoing the braidings of self by taking apart spheres that are increasingly closer to his selfness. He first destroys his social exteriority; then his interface of exteriority and interiority is effaced; and following on this, he utterly erases his volition, his interiority, his own human existence.[13] This generates his apotheosis, the emergence of a selfness of a higher order, in this instance through self-sacrifice (but not through suicide, which sorely tempts him in *Hercules Furens*).[14]

On his triumphant return from the underworld in *Hercules Furens*, Hercules kills Lycus, tyrant of Thebes, the "alien" exterior threatening his family. He then sets about destroying himself (thus Juno's prophetic comment: "You are seeking somebody who is Hercules' match? There is none if not he himself: he shall make war on himself"). Becoming mad, he kills his wife and, more significantly, his sons, who are the flowering seminal seeds of his interiority, indeed, projections of his very being. His sons take impetus from his own interiority but are shaped in his social ex-

teriority. They are inextricably linked to his surface, to his interface of interiority and exteriority. These killings give a forefeeling of what will come. Massacring his family, Hercules loses the exterior signs of his identity and his inner sociality of selfness. In other words, Hercules' interface of interiority and exteriority—which makes and keeps him human—is destroyed (though, as noted, he later rediscovers this).

In Seneca's *Hercules on Mount Oeta*, his wife, Deianeira, thinking that she is putting a love potion on his festive clothing, mistakenly dips his garb in the poison of the many-headed Hydra, whom Hercules had killed. The garment becomes a torturing, agonizing second skin, glued to his surface. His interface is poisoned and is killing him. Just as formerly his interiority turned on him, killing those in his exterior social world closest to him, now this exterior world is made inaccessible to him, destroying his interiority, his selfness. Cancik-Lindemaier states that his form is eroded, his physical identity lost. She comments, "He now consciously prepares his death as the death of a hero or a wise man," burning himself on a huge funeral pyre, until nothing but a small heap of ashes is left.

It strikes me that the theme of sacrifice is prominent in these plays of Seneca. It is noteworthy that, in *Hercules Furens*, after Hercules kills the tyrant of Thebes he prepares a sacrifice to the gods, addressing them as equals in what he perceives as a perfectly unified cosmos which he has rid of evil. He is thus elevating himself to the level of the gods. Then the rebounding force of his illusory perception becomes clear—his sacrifice, his reaching for the gods as their equal, is not accepted by them. His vision of the cosmos becomes distorted, fragmented, and conflicted (the very opposite of his claim), and he sees himself attacking heaven (and so, hardly at one with it), while he himself is attacked from below. In his mad rage he slaughters his family. (Here this may well be the effect of a failed sacrifice, utterly self-destructive, since he is out of his mind. The failed sacrifice reverses the direction and momentum of sacrifice. Instead of forging connection and integration—in this instance, with the gods—the failed sacrifice does the opposite, fragmenting and destroying.)[15]

In *Hercules on Mount Oeta*, his self-immolation is accepted by the gods. He must be brought to destroy himself, not through despair (not as a suicide) but as a hero. I call his deliberate self-immolation a self-sacrifice because of what follows: Hercules' voice announces that the fire has destroyed his mortal part, while his divine nature (inherited from his biological father, Zeus) is going to heaven. In this final phase of his self-transformation, his creation (perhaps originary, since he becomes a god) is generated from his self-destruction. He transcends his selfness by destroying his selfness, himself, in the world.[16] Or, perhaps one could argue that in both of Seneca's plays, Hercules is continually attacking (with rage, madness, and a poisoned "second skin") his own surface of selfness, his interface of interiority and exteriority that separates the sociality of his selfness from that of the social world, thereby dividing, no less, the world of gods (Hercules' divine nature, his interiority) from the world of humans (Hercules' physical body). Here the striving for the absolute unity of sociality, of interiority and exteriority, is one path to transcendence.

Speculatively, without conflating the Roman and the Athenian in their respective periods, if one takes a moment to compare these plays of Seneca (and Euripides) to Euripides' *Medea*, the latter illuminates quite a different path to transcendence through sacrifice. Medea somehow controls forces that Herakles cannot. He

(and Hercules) are exterior beings battling the animalistic exteriors of others. She is an interior being, transforming herself as her destruction of others makes her more and more autonomous of them and of the consequences of their devastation. Yet this self-autonomy emerges almost against her will, unlike Herakles/Hercules, who thinks he is a hero deliberately shaping the world.

Unlike Hercules, whose great heroic strength emphasizes the violent clash of surfaces, his and that of his opponents, Medea is a sorceress, one whose interiority is so powerful in attacking others precisely because it is recursive in relation to itself, thus hidden from and largely invulnerable to the social world.[17] Unlike Hercules, Medea's inner sociality of being is the locus of her power in the social world. Medea, one may say, cooks the emotional textures of the exterior world within herself according to her own recipes. She thereby impacts on the exterior world without leaving her own innerness, her selfness. From the outset she is a self-transformer—but within her own self. Unlike Hercules, Medea is at home within her innerness.

Thus, in my reading, Medea's trajectory of self-transformation is predicated on the destruction—the sacrificing—of the selves of others. To briefly recapitulate Euripides' play and some of Medea's mythical biography, she lives initially in Colchis, a provincial kingdom described as "a land at the earth's edge," "a barbarous land."[18] There she is the king's daughter who falls in love with Jason, the leader of the Argonauts who seek the Golden Fleece.[19] The well-being of the kingdom depends on the Fleece. Medea, abetted by her brother, helps Jason to steal the Fleece. The loss of the Fleece seems to lead, eventually, to the decline of Colchis. The Argonauts flee across the sea, pursued by the king of Colchis. Medea kills her brother, dismembers him, and throws the pieces of his body onto the waves. The grief-stricken king stops to retrieve every piece of his son's corpse, and the Argonauts escape to Iolchis, ruled by King Pelias, Jason's uncle. Losing his son (and Medea), the king of Colchis is reduced to childlessness, his descent line extinguished. Pelias had dispatched Jason to steal the Fleece in exchange for the throne that Pelias had usurped. Pelias does not keep his bargain with Jason; and so Medea tricks Pelias's daughters into trying to rejuvenate him by cutting his body into pieces and boiling them, thereby ruining his "whole house" (l. 484), and effectively destroying Iolchis. Jason and Medea flee to the major city of Corinth, where she lives quietly and bears him two sons. Years later, Jason leaves Medea and marries the daughter of King Creon of Corinth. Medea sends her sons with a poisoned robe (a second skin?) to the bride. When she puts it on, the robe incinerates her and her father as well, when he holds her corpse. The descent line of Creon is extinguished. Medea prepares her two sons as a sacrifice and kills them.[20] Probably in response to her sacrifice, her grandfather, the Sun, sends his heavenly chariot pulled by dragons to lift Medea from Corinth to Athens, the center (ll. 844–845)—where, in versions of her mythic biography, she marries the king.

Euripides' drama stresses Medea's intention to destroy Jason's whole house/family (*domus*). She cries to her sons, "Death take you, with your father, and perish his whole house!" (l. 113) and "I will kill my sons . . . when I have made Jason's whole house a shambles, I will leave Corinth" (ll. 888–890). Jason is left in a state of childlessness (*apaidia*), apparently unable to beget more children. Like Herakles, Jason also waits without any future for old age and death to extinguish him.[21] By

contrast, Medea promises King Aegeus of Athens that she will cause him to be fertile if he will accept her in his kingdom (ll. 717–718).

Medea betrays her father, kills her brother, instigates the tricky killing of the king of Iolchis, and kills her sons, thereby destroying Jason. I understand each of these acts as a sacrifice, as acts of fragmentation that destroy the kingdoms in which they are located or to which they are connected. Each of these kingdoms represents a level in an ontic order of existence that is organized hierarchically, from the lowest, Colchis, to the highest, Athens. In terms of space, these levels are laid out from a cultural periphery, Colchis, to the very center of civilization, Athens. Each sacrifice takes apart the ontological level in which it is embedded. In part, this is what each sacrifice accomplishes by extinguishing or disrupting lines of descent—the futures of ontic levels.[22] So, too, each sacrifice creates the horizon of a higher ontic order of existence toward which Medea moves and which is reshaped or recreated around her as she enters. Medea emerges from each sacrifice reconstituted or transformed, her interior power strengthened (as I have suggested, even against her will).

The sacrifice simultaneously destroys and creates.[23] Through this relationship between destruction and creation, Medea annihilates, level by level, the ontic order of the cosmos. As she does this she reconstitutes the Medea of the previous level, transcending herself as she rises toward the divine, freed from the embeddedness of the cosmic level she does away with, transforming herself in relation to the cosmic horizon toward which she ascends. As Medea sacrifices social exteriorities, her own social interiority grows in power (and perhaps in complexity?). Creation emerges from destruction, the cosmos reshaped. Perhaps one could argue that the presence of Medea always threatens world order, given her ongoing destruction of descent lines.[24] Yet what did it mean in ancient Athens not only to kill but also to sacrifice the line of descent? To turn the descent line into a sacrifice? Was it something terrible in terms of self-transformation? Something that terrified the audience in the theater of Dionysus?

Self-transformation, Interiority, Exteriority

Other chapters show just how deliberate the cutting of connectivity between the inside and the outside of the person in self-transformation may be, as selfness imagines its interior horizons of possibility and perhaps traverses them. Margalit Finkelberg tells us that in ancient Greek cosmology, gods and humans existed together within the same universal order, ruled by the same moral laws, yet were unbridgeably separated from one another. The individual could become one with the holistic cosmos by searching within himself for its divine logos, the logos that humans shared with gods, and then actualizing this design by living its immanence.

In my understanding, the ancient Greek cosmos is organic[25]—in other words, a cosmos that lives through its own design, that subsumes all of its constituent elements (including its creators, if there are any) within itself, and that relates all of these elements to one another through entropy (or analogous processes) and regeneration. Causality is a function of cosmic design and organization. For example, an organic cosmos (unlike a "mechanical" one) transforms itself. The organic cosmos is necessarily social, in the deep sense of this term. This is the significance of the

dense networks of living (changing and transforming) connections among its various interacting beings.

In Finkelberg's terms, self-transformation in the ancient Greek cosmos depended upon the individual discovering the cosmic design within his own being, thereby uniting with the divine. Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* inscribes the apotheosis of Oedipus. This interior search seemed to require the individual to cut his ties with social exteriority. Thus Oedipus severs his links to Thebes and to his sons, isolating himself within his self. Even more pointedly, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus has blinded himself. Padel comments:

> Oedipus's explanation of why he blinded himself endorses the sense that the body is more vulnerable, through eyes, to inward-coming things than it is powerful in imposing itself on the outside world. He talks of his act as a defense against invasion, against painful emotion and perception that would come at him through his eyes. He wanted to block the suffering this would bring. . . . Emotional suffering, like perception or disease, is due to intrusion. It wounds like a weapon, flows inward. . . . The pain he [Oedipus] would feel on seeing his father would come in through his eyes, into his self, with the sight.[26]

Yet does this mean that Oedipus, in severing his ties with the exterior social world, has also effaced his own interior sociality? The question is crucial to an understanding of asceticism as one pathway to self-transformation. One may answer in the affirmative if the goal of self-transformation is, say, voiding the self in order to enter into a unity of oneness. Yet if the goal is that of apotheosis in an organic cosmos, the answer may be negative, since the relationship between deity and human probably continues to be social (again in the deep, mutually interactive sense of this term), and this (in my conception) necessarily entails the sociality of the psyche, not only that of the human but also that of the deity. For Greek tragedy, the answer is perhaps given by Sophocles' own history—Finkelberg tells us that after his death, Sophocles, a priest of Asclepius during his lifetime, was canonized as a divine hero and worshipped in Athens under a new, divine name.

A number of chapters in this volume point to the presence of what I am calling interior sociality and to its roles in self-transformation. As I noted earlier, Janet Gyatso's study of *sādhana* meditation emphasizes the exterior, social aspects of this kind of self-transformation. Yet other, interior aspects seem socially interactive here, especially in the "creation" phase during which the meditator makes himself over into a deity inside his selfness, a deity who then will interact with and become that selfsame deity. In the "creation" phase, the meditator must void his exterior and interior sociality in order to enable a mantric seed syllable to appear, out of which sprouts the full image of the deity that the meditator is turning into.

Self-creation here seems to depend on emerging selfness (the meditator) interacting with emerging selfness (the deity), self-to-self within the emerging self (the meditator-deity) so that the two wholly merge, becoming identical. This may be a complex way of saying that without the recreation of (and through) the interior sociality of selfness, the meditator would void himself yet remain a nullity. Instead, the voiding of customary inner sociality opens "space" for the shaping of the extraordinary sociality of a deity coming into being, emerging through selfness seeing selfness

emerging through the eyes of deity, but within one's emerging self. The paradoxicality of these remarks is not my doing but is embedded in the whole notion of someone created from nothingness, the notion of a seed syllable that contains its own self-generative, interactive power. This is less dialectical than it is transformative. The process is accentuated by imagining that the real deity, "out there," comes into the meditator and blesses the imagined and imagining emerging deity (the meditator).[27]

Wai-yee Li demonstrates how the issue of immortality in ancient China was pervaded with ambivalence, oscillating between a desire to transcend mortality and a fear of losing one's humanity (or, perhaps one's humanness?). She comments: "To attain immortality one goes against life and nature." When one becomes so different, one's humanness is irretrievable. In other words, one erases the organic sociality of living in order to enjoy immortal life. The near paradoxicality of the formulation lies in the nature of the Chinese cosmos, which is continuously transforming itself. If the immortal is laden with the materialism of life everlasting and does not attain oneness with the natural rhythms and pulsations of the cosmos, then he becomes a somewhat static anomaly within the organic cosmos, losing the apprehensions and values of the social world. I would add that he also loses the interior sociality that makes him human in relation to himself.

The story of Xue Wei's dreamy metamorphosis into a carp points to the inexorable loss of exterior sociality, but perhaps also to its interior absence. The fish plays in the fluid medium of water, free-swimming, roaming, unencumbered, creative—and unreflexive. The fish is in utter harmony with the medium of water through which it flashes and flows, the medium that offers no resistance, indeed aids its passage. The fish seems to have no interiority of selfness as it practices its bodily appetites, including hunger. As it swallows the baited hook, the hook that is the reentry to the social world the fish has left, the problem of sociality immediately surfaces. The fish in the social world remains the metamorph, unable to communicate with humans. But within the fish, the conflict between carp and human is suddenly present and vociferous. Despite his minced presence as a meal to be eaten by his friends, Xue Wei insists on the truth of his inner humanness, to no avail.

Perhaps the story tells us that in self-transformation, as one moves toward immortality, inner sociality has no impact in the world so long as exterior sociality no longer exists, and moreover that, clearly, one does not translate directly into the other. But the story also tells us that in seeking transcendence without interior sociality (here expressed as the lack of inner self-reflexivity), we are helpless against the baited hooks of social reality. Certainly, Xue Wei's friends are tortured by this vision, and by the inability of interior selfness to communicate through a nonsocial exterior; they thus eschew eating minced fish (after all, they might be eating . . .).

Transformational Space

The opening of inner space where none had existed before seems crucial to self-transformation. Interior and exterior sociality are hardly isomorphic and harmonious. Selfness is not merely changed in accordance with cultural paradigms, nor is such change a direct function of psychodynamic processes. More so than psychody-

namic domains, interior sociality partakes of the social imaginary, while in contrast to the sociality of social and cultural orders (which are limited by numerous and powerful normative constraints), the inner sociality of selfness is exponential in its (near infinite?) capacities to imagine transformation.[28] The act of imagining difference, otherness, opens inner space (and time?)—whatever is imagined moves into and lives within the space imagined for it.[29] The significance of the distinction between interior and exterior sociality lies to no small degree in their continuous but recursive relationship. The social psyche and social order are simultaneously connected through similarity and separated by difference. (By contrast, the social order and the psychological psyche are separated primarily by difference—different principles, forms, and processes of organization and change in each domain.) Each imagines the other as having the capacity to imagine the other. But selfness has its own inner recursivity such that, to no small degree, it is responsible to itself for its imaginings.

In their introduction, the editors comment, "Healing could . . . be seen as the basic logic informing the very idea of self-transformation in all the cultures studied here." This is a most important point. In the broadest sense, healing does the repair and synthesis of the world, the renewal of entropy, the rearticulation of social relationships—and also does all of these analogously within the "microcosm" of the person. The inner voices of sociality, of embodied self-awareness, are probably crucial to the well-being of the person. Self-transformation is one way of healing the inner voices of sociality by opening new, deep space within the person in which selfness can imagine once more (with some help) its constitutive refractions as someone whole, or as a new beginning. Perhaps one should think about the interior social worlds of self-transformers and self-transforming systems in ways that some scholars (primarily psychologists) have conceived, for example, the *paracosms* of private worlds of children.[30]

Guy Stroumsa's chapter contributes to an apprehension of how interior space is opened through self-transformation. In my reading of the story of Symeon of Emesa, the very act of shaping privacy opens depth—perhaps where none had existed before—within which the transformation of the self proceeds. This privacy, Symeon's depth, is something like a "mask." Symeon is "masked" by the inner isolation in which he lived (no one knew how he prayed, what he ate, and so forth). So, too, his innerness was "masked" in public by his mocking laughter and foolishness. His interior changed not only because he hid from others (in private, in public), but also because this very act of masking opened inner space within which transformation was done. This opening of space within interiority has transformative qualities of its own. In this reading, "masking" works in two ways. One, indeed, is the protection offered by madness and laughter in the dangerous satanic world; but the other is the imaginative opening of innerness to itself and to God. Thus Symeon becomes increasingly virtuous within himself through interaction with the "mask of madness" that protects him from the sinful, demonic world—and his inner reality transforms within the space he has opened.

The idea of the opening of new space may also be applied to the *salos* saint who wants to become like Christ and so first becomes a beast. Instead of the saint descending into a beast in order to climb, perhaps another (or an additional process) is

at work. The saint as beast, as ruminating grazer, loses his human qualities yet seems a strangely pacific, perhaps asexual beast. This may be less suggestive of paradox (the beast becoming a saint) but more of an *inner route* for the leaving of ordinary humankind by imagining and opening interior space where none had existed. Thus, the human is in the human world; the grazer is not in the human world; the fool is back in the human world, but on its edge, barely of it; while the saint who is unmasked as an angel is hardly in the human world. In my reading, this process—becoming a beast, a fool—is more like moving "out" into newly opened inner space in order to evolve there and to return in a higher state—thus less like descent and ascent. The beast, like the fool, is a form of exterior "masking" that opens and protects interior space; the grazer, then, may be a basic foundation on which to build. In any case, here "masking" seems to create difference at the interface of exterior and interior that, facing outward, protects and hides interiority but that, facing inward, opens a greater depth of being, given over to self-transformation.

Two final points, on comparison. Interior and exterior socialities can be contrasted within a given culture and historical period. This same kind of comparison could be extended to a variety of cultures. How are interior social worlds of selfness constituted and changed? Are there parallels with constitution and change in the exterior social world? How, then, do interiority and exteriority affect and effect one another—transforming and letting loose selfness in the exterior world, a world that resists and acquiesces, with numerous gradations? In the introduction, the editors emphasize the importance of learning about the effects self-transformations have on various civilizations. Yet not to be overlooked is the interaction between interior transformations of social selfness and changes in the exterior social world, which together may catalyze and shape great changes in conceptions of selfness, social order, their disintegration and healing.[31]

Are interior and exterior socialities at all comparable? Perhaps they are, though our communication with one another about interior sociality is necessarily exterior. This probably imposes axiomatic constrictions on our comprehension of the interiority of others (and this may affect our comprehension of our own interiority). So this perhaps locates the interiority of others out of reach of any direct, linear contact. Yet if we do exert effort in this direction, and if we seek to compare versions of transformation across cultures, we need also to address cultural contrasts in the interior sociality of selfness, a locus that (to my knowledge) is uncharted. My own view is that interior sociality contains great flexibility and freedom to imagine horizons of being. Nonetheless, what are one's premises to be in considering domains of interior sociality? Should one assume that interior sociality has structure—connections between relatively fixed points, voices, or feelings of selfness, that is, a kind of interior network of self? Or perhaps the premise might be that the interiority of voice is more quantumlike and processual, such that the focus on one interior voice within a field of possible voices changes the field of relationships of all the others? This may be more akin to ongoing, emergent musical compositions than to more fixed structures. If interiority is conceived of as more processual than fixed, then this sort of organization may generate metaselves (cultural archtypes of interiority?). How models of interiority—of the sociality of interiority—may look, feel, and be heard within selves across cultures is, I believe, an open question hardly thought of. New questions like this, and new ways to ask them, may come from listening to one's self.

Notes

1. I am not referring here to the possible construction of multiple personalities—alters who are others—within the same being (Hacking 1998), but rather to refractions of selfness that necessarily come into being through selfness, and perhaps to selfness whose very existence may depend on such refractions.

2. I often use the term "selfness," rather than "self," in order to avoid pointing to the thingness of self, and to instead highlight the possibility of its existence as interactive bundles or configurations of *qualities* of being. My claim is that the interior existence of selfness is necessarily social because this existence must be interactive within selfness, within "itself" and in relation to the exterior world, which obviously shapes selfness interactively in relation to selfness.

3. Though this kind of thinking has been questioned by scholars like Louis Dumont (1977), Bruce Kapferer (1988), and McKim Marriott (1989), all scholars of South Asia and the first two also of Western social orders. Though I will not do so, the contributions to this volume could be evaluated in terms of their acceptance of the distinction between the psychological individual and the social.

4. To pursue this line of thinking, the quantumlike possibilities of interior selfness are pinched off (or altered?) as they emerge into the exterior social world, crystalized or channeled into recognized social forms. However, social worlds may have their own quantumlike possibilities—then again there are transformational functions in any movement among interior and exterior possibilities of crystalization. (For an argument in this direction in terms of Śaiva myths of the Pine Forest, see Handelman, "Emptying.")

5. See Scarry 1985.

6. These socialities obviously differ in their quantumlike possibilities of what might be termed quality, scale, scope, and so forth. The interior sociality of selfness likely shapes itself more profoundly through its own recursive capacities for imagination than do the socialities of persons in the social world. Indeed, "the sense of self is an experience" (Harre and Gillett 1994, 111), yet this is also the experiencing of selfness within selfness.

7. On braiding, see Handelman, in press.

8. Self, as Robert Jay Lifton (1969) comments, may be a person's symbol of his own organism, and therefore (I would add) a metaperspective of the self, but symbols are multivocalic (as Victor Turner puts it). Thus their (at times) apparent fixity may well be illusory, given the shifting relationships between signifier and signified (relationships which, for that matter, are actually temporal and therefore necessarily processual [Handelman, "Transformation," 1998, 417]). For a critique of a semiotics of self, see Csordas 1997, 5–15.

9. See Handelman 1998b. In his chapter on the *Tirukkovaiyar*, David Shulman argues for a continuum "stretching from ecstatic possession [by deity] of the village ritual type, on the one end, to the 'pure' states of erotic love-possession on the other." However, one can argue that the emptiness of interiority (love-madness) may lead directly to total possession by the deity, and vice-versa. The two ends of the linear continuum are very close to one another, indeed, perhaps joined. Spherical thinking—in which concentricity is allowed a variety of topological relationships that are embedded within and through themselves—may make better sense here than the linear. Shulman's idea of "concentric embedding" need not be restricted to the interiority of selfness; it may also describe aspects of the exterior, recursive, social world—especially ritual-like phenomena such as possession.

10. Padel 1992, 174, 175.

11. See Bouvrie 1992, 92. For the argument that Thebes was frequently represented as an "anti-Athens," see Zeitlin 1993.

12. See Plessner 1970.

13. A possible example of "concentric embedding" comes from Moshe Idel's contribu-

tion. The idle man, waiting in the graveyard for one female, the princess, is led by her beauty to another, more deeply embedded, female, the *Shekhinah*, God represented by a female principle. These two are likely the same female on different levels of embedment. However, the idle man himself partakes of this embedment, his own changes overlapping with those of the female. His body in the graveyard may be understood as dying within itself, in a place of rest compatible with "death." With actual death, the spirit separates from the body. Ironically, this is what happens here—the idle man becomes quiescent, "dead," as it were, and is reborn, his spirit uniting with God. The female and male seem to be embedded in one another, descending through one another in overlapping and changing ways, but joining to one another on the deepest level of embedment, which is also the source of their creation, emergence, and differentiation.

14. Euripides' Herakles follows much this process of unbraiding selfness, but his self-transformation resigns him to his fate; indeed, it seems to lead him to think again on his violence toward the animalistic beings he has destroyed, adding himself to these beings (Euripides 1963, ll. 1277–1278)—himself as the asocial animal within and outside himself who murders his sons, murders his lineage, his future, and therefore himself.

15. In my understanding, sacrifice generates connections, for example, between levels of cosmos—creation emerging from destruction. One can say that sacrifice recreates or re-forms cosmos—this is the deeper significance of generating connections where none had existed before. The failed sacrifice, then, turns on the sacrificer, creation turned into ongoing destruction, unless the process can be reversed. In some sense, the failed sacrifice is like a ritual run in reverse and approaching sorcery, or more accurately, self-sorcery, sorcerizing oneself.

16. By contrast, Euripides' Herakles recovers his humanity, which perhaps was obscured by his heroism, but at the cost of his future. His own self-transformation is one of an agonizing depth of feeling that can only be experienced, not overcome or transcended.

It is important to recall that the Athenian theater of Euripides' time was (in my terms, Handelman, "Models," 1998) designed to effect collective self-transformation in its large audience. Embedded in Dionysian ritual, performed in the theater of Dionysus, the tragic theater, in Bouvrie's terms, raised dominant cultural themes to the surface of consciousness—themes that indeed were twisted, corroded, inverted to arouse profound emotional reactions of horror, disgust, and perhaps tears of affliction among the audience. Carefully chosen for its calibrated emotional effects within the audience (and so, in their social world), each tragic play was performed only once in Athens itself, during the annual great festival of Dionysus (Bouvrie 1992, 1993).

17. In the terms of this argument, Medea's powerfully recursive interiority makes her somewhat autonomous of the materia that are shared by the human, the physical world, and the divine, and that contribute to tying all of these together in complex interdependencies. (On these materia, the innards of being, see Padel 1992, 48, and elsewhere.) The autonomy of her innerness asserts itself in the face of the tribulations that others cause her.

18. Euripedes 1963, ll. 255, 535.

19. Medea's falling in love is the doing of Aphrodite. Medea, of course, is not entirely autonomous; though I would argue that her interior sociality becomes increasingly autonomous of the exterior world as her mythical biography proceeds. Perhaps it is more to the point to argue that each time Medea destroys the selves of others, her own interiority grows in power. In this sense, she is sacrificing others to herself.

20. Myths of Medea also hint that she sacrificed her children. According to Pausanias, the Corinthians sent for Medea, who was in Iolcus with Jason, and gave her their kingdom; through her, Jason became king of Corinth. As her children were born, Medea carried each to the sanctuary of Hera and concealed them there in the belief that this would make them immortal. This "concealment" may be understood as killing, which, in my terms, is sacrifi-

cial. (This reference to Pausanias is from Elizabeth Gebhardt's lecture "Corinthian Cult of Children: 6th–3rd Century B.C.," at the conference "Celebrations: Sanctuaries and the Vestiges of Cult Activity," Norwegian Institute at Athens, 12–16 May 1999).

21. Bouvrie 1992, 223–224.

22. Are there intimations towards the close of *Medea* that she can foretell (and perhaps control?) the future, as she tells Jason, "You . . . shall die an unheroic death, your head shattered by a timber from the Argo's hull" (ll. 1386–1388)?

23. On this argument, see Kapferer 1997.

24. In the corpus of tragedies by Euripides, the *Bacchae* may come closest to bridging ideas of possession and (proto-?) sacrifice in self-transformation. The maenads seem possessed by Dionysus. Their ongoing formations of selfness are diverted from the social into a world in which the interiorities of selfness of these women are isomorphic with the Dionysian universe that inverts the socialities of culture. The maenads enact their mysteries within forests of wilderness and on the crags of wildness—a universe within which the kin relations of culture seem not to exist. (On the Dionysian world of the maenads as inversion, see Bouvrie 1997.) That this isomorphism is generated through trance induced by music, dance, and wine heightens the likelihood of possession by the deity. In the *Bacchae,* the horizons of selfness of the maenads are no longer emerging into being. The women *are* wholly whatever it is they have become. In this there are no ambiguities of perception or ambivalences of feeling—no interiority of selfness that differs from exterior sociality in the Dionysian universe of maenadism. Experience in the world of maenadism is, one may say, a simultaneous recursivity.

In the *Bacchae,* "masking" (which may give autonomy to interiority and/or exteriority) offers neither aid nor protection. Nothing can be hidden, and thus there is nothing to hide. Neither Cadmus (the father of Agave and the grandfather of her son, Pentheus) nor Tiresias the seer, both of whom dress in maenadic garb and who are prepared to dance, are able to join the maenads. So, too, Pentheus, king of Thebes, who is induced by Dionysus to don female garb in order to spy on the maenads, is easily given away.

It is in this inverted world that Pentheus is perceived to be a lion and killed by his mother and by the maenads in the manner of a maenadic animal sacrifice. They tear off his limbs and head with their bare hands. Is the killing of Pentheus (and the self-destruction of Agave) a sacrifice? In relation to the vengeance of Dionysus, it seems to have connotations of this. Undoubtedly, Agave's interiority of selfness is transformed through her act of self-damage (as Padel calls this), though she is possessed and mad at the time. Sticking her son's head on a maenadic staff, she leaves the inverted maenadic world of wilderness and enters the city, calling out for her beloved son in order to show him the head of the lion she has vanquished. Like Herakles after killing his children, Agave is enabled to return to her own interiority of self through interacting with another—in this instance, Cadmus. In this way she becomes conscious again of her selfness—and so of her son's head held in her hands, and then of her role in his killing. Alone, within the agony of her interiority, having torn asunder her future and that of her line, she can only enter into distant exile. However, the maenadic cult of Dionysus that had been opposed by Pentheus enters Thebes. Agave's exile is itself total—from Thebes and from its maenadic antiworld, the note on which the *Bacchae* closes.

The *Bacchae* builds a totalized world of maenadism, within which the sacrificing of Pentheus to Dionysus is inevitable. The death of Pentheus is utterly explicable within this maenadic world. By contrast, Herakles alone goes mad within the social world of mundane familial relations. That Madness strikes him is not quite explicable, though expectable in its unexpectedness. For her part, Medea is neither possessed nor mad. Padel (1995, 208) comments that "killing your children is self-damaging in another way. Killing your kin, you break divine law. Herakles is polluted by murdering his children. . . . The worst, strangest thing about Medea is that she is *not* mad. And apparently she does not incur pollution." Indeed, I

have argued in this epilogue that Medea's interior selfness is transformed into transcendence through her sacrifice of others, while Herakles and, so too, Agave, are destroyed through their self-transformations. On a continuum of self-transformation through sacrifice, Agave is at one extreme, Medea at the other, and Herakles in between.

25. See Padel 1992.

26. Ibid., 63.

27. By contrast, Sarah Sviri's discussion of early Sufism highlights the increasing division through self-transformation between changes in the exterior sociality of the seeker and the effacement of his interior sociality. In training selfness, the seeker initially abstains or renounces the social world as he learns to fear God. In later phases, as the seeker's heart comes closer to (perhaps merges with?) God, and even as he is detached from the social world (for example, avoiding leadership), his social character is accentuated through exterior qualities of generosity, attentiveness to and compassion for others, and so forth (see n. 55 of Sviri's chapter in this book). His exteriority seems to reflect the maturation of his interiority. In this instance, his innerness seems to me less social (the heart of his being is with God), even though his love of God, appearing on his exterior, seems potently and pointedly social.

28. That one speaks to oneself already opens the way to madness, in religious terms, communicating with transcendent or other beings, becoming possessed and possessing others, and so forth, since the very presence of inner voice is already pronounced. But does one's own interior voice(s) need to be stilled for self-transformation to proceed?

29. Again, interior selfness is not a straightforward reflection of social and cultural orders. Perhaps because interior sociality is insulated from exterior social worlds, selfness can imagine more freely and truly.

30. Cohen and MacKeith 1991.

31. See Handelman 1985.

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